

So, this isn't the full chapter I wanted, for reasons I'll discuss at the end. But if you were hoping to see a lot of Ranma-style romance and a bit of action, that at least I can give you, LOL. This is primarily a Jenny/Ranma and Jenny/Juvia centric chapter. But don't worry, there's Erza there too...

This has been edited by *Justlovereadin'* and now *Hiryō*. Changes made since he saw it: A few names, mostly of techniques have been corrected to better match the style in the original work and that used previously, since I can never remember that stuff. So while it should read better now, there wasn't any changes that effected the plot.

Chapter 25: Winter's Warm Beginning

After beating the two of them down for the effrontery of waking him up, Ranma began training Gajeel and Natsu in earnest, dragging them out into the forest. With winter fully upon Magnolia, if not overbearing just yet, there was a bit of snow on the ground now even under the trees and their breaths came out in puffs.

He held up a large placard, slamming it into the nearest tree, smirking at them both as he pointed to the outline written there. "All right you two, I'm going to be training you in three different areas. One, magical power. Both of you have a tremendous amount of magical power. However, when you attack you need to make sure that you are using all of that power effectively, not wasting it. Two, styles. As we already discussed you both need training in combat styles. And three, will be a twice-weekly full on spar of the two of you against me.

"So, you're actually taking training these two seriously," Makarov said from the treetops before either of the younger Dragon Slayers could respond and surprising all three who hadn't heard or even smelled him. He now hopped down, looking up at Ranma quizzically as he stood in front of him.

"That's right," Ranma replied with a nod. "The two of them have a lot of potential and I think I can help them bring it out. To that end what they need is experience, control and technique. I can give them all of that."

"What about me?" A new voice interjected as Erza moved towards them over the snow. Her presence didn't surprise Ranma nearly as much as Makarov being right on top of them had.

With how cold and still the air was, scent didn't carry in winter as it would in any other season and he knew Erza could move surprisingly silently for all the armor she wore.

She was once more resplendent in her regular every day armor, which had been buffed to a dull shine, and the broken gauntlet and greaves had been replaced. Staring across at Ranma with her eyes alight with challenge. "In two days' time, all of my broken armors will be replaced, and I believe at that point that the two of us, can finally start a full on spar of our own."

"I'm looking forward to it," Ranma said, his tone suggesting a lot more than the words should, causing Erza to flush happily while Natsu's eyes widened, having surprisingly understood some of the undercurrents there.

"Is this a private party? Well too bad, because if so, I am so crashing it!" Jenny shouted, as she, appeared flying out of the sky and landing nearby, dragging Juvia along with her, before canceling her Take Over Gundam Deathscythe technique. She grinned at Ranma, slamming one fist into the other palm, tossing her blonde hair out of her face with a head flip as before winking at him. "You didn't think that I was joking do you, I really do want to train with you."

"I'm a harsh master," Ranma objected. "Ya might want to look before ya leap here."

"I think everyone but Wendy understands that," Erza said dryly while staring at Jenny, almost challengingly and yet there was a bit of friendly edge to it.

"Fine, but I'm not going to train you every day of the week. You two aren't the only ones who want some training."

The others blinked at him, but Ranma simply pointed up into a tree right above him, and Laxus appeared from deeper in the woods, tossing his fur coat – which was more for fashion's sake than anything else – to the side as he sneered at the others. "Laxus and I are going to have two days full on sparring every week."

"I want the same," Erza said instantly.

"Hell no!" Natsu and Gajeel both yelled, shaking their heads before Natsu went on, "That cuts into the days you spend with us training to three."

"That would actually be perfect," Ranma replied, waving their concerns away. "One day per area I'll be training you in and then you can join the free for all one of the other days." It would actually turn out to be one area of training emphasized per day, because Ranma was very clear that he wanted to beat into the two of them that technique mattered more than simple brute stats.

“Now, that’s enough interruptions, let’s get training!” Ranma shouted, slamming his hands together and creating a shockwave that blasted Natsu and Gajeel off their feet and even made Makarov stumble. Laxus and Erza moved through it, while Jenny and Juvia weren’t close enough to be susceptible to it.

“Ah, ah, me first,” Laxus said tartly, teleporting himself forward to stand between Ranma and the other two Dragon Slayers. “The lot of you had an adventure while I was stuck in that freaking Crystal. I want some fun of my own damn it.”

“Agreed,” Ranma said before anyone else could object, lowering himself into a stance, his hands clenching and unclenching. “Let’s get it on!” Then without warning he was streaking away through the trees. Laxus blinked, then guffawed going after him in a flare of lightning magic.

“We’re following him, right?” Gajeel muttered, only to find Natsu already racing away, followed by the others. “Damn it!”

With their friends following, the two powerhouses moved further away from Magnolia through the woods for several more miles, before turning to one another in a large clearing, its open area marked with a few inches of snow. As they did, Ranma noticed that Laxus was now holding a large sword of some kind.

It was a huge thing, with one side being flat, the other side being jagged like a saw’s tooth. It really didn’t resemble any single sword type Ranma had seen before, more it looked like a weird amalgamation. “And what’s that supposed to be?”

“You’ll see, Mister ‘I can use guns and escrima sticks and anything else’,” Laxus snarked, his lips twisting into a challenging sneer. “Now we going to talk or are we going to rock?”

Ranma laughed, crouching down once more, while gathering his magic to his hands while pumping his ki into his legs, feeling both magic and ki working in tandem within his body, making him far, **far** stronger than he had been before the trip to Belserion’s cave. He didn’t think he would have to all out against Laxus, but if Laxus brought a few tricks to the game, it would be worth it. “Ready or not, here I come!”

He bolted forward and Laxus did the same twisting his sword around, wielding it as if it weighed nothing. He stabbed it forward, then ducked to one side and flung it around in a wide arc, as Ranma leaped up into the sky. Laxus grinned, and lightning surged from the hand holding the weapon. “Dance, Lightning Blade: Chain Configuration!”

With that and the power surging through it, the sword changed, instantly shifting into several dozen chains around a single handle, lashing out towards Ranma. At the end of each chain was a barbed tip.

Despite being taken completely by surprise, Ranma's speed was such that he could still dodge most of them. But one chain wrapped around his arm, and Ranma found himself being pulled down towards Laxus faster than he could compensate. The larger Dragon Slayer slammed a fist into Ranma's chest, tossing him back into the air, before twirling around with Ranma still trapped in the chain, slamming him down as he roared out, "Lightning Dragon Slayer's Shocking Chains!"

Ranma however regained his feet easily, and despite grimacing at the pain of the lightning flashing through his body from the chain, roared and grabbed the chain himself. With a wrench he tossed Laxus into the air, causing the bigger man to gasp in shock, then put up his fists to block the series of blows that Ranma landed in the next second having leaped up after him.

At that point, the fight became one where Laxus was trying to get back down to the ground and Ranma was trying to stop him. With the pummeling Ranma was dishing out, Laxus couldn't concentrate enough to teleport away at first. Then he blocked one blow just wide enough to see behind Ranma, and between one blink and the next teleported there, twisting Ranma around in the chain that Ranma still had on one arm.

This proved to be a mistake, as Ranma used the momentum of that to close again, a fist finding Laxus' face and flinging him backwards even as the lightning continued to flare through his body.

Laxus grunted but then dropped his weapon for a second. This released the tension that had been holding Ranma's arm in the chain, in turn releasing him before Ranma could use it to close once more or pull Laxus off balance.

"Is that all you got!?" Ranma shouted, landing lightly on his feet.

"I'm just getting started," Laxus roared back, kicking his sword's hilt up from the ground to his hand. Without his power going through it, the sword had returned to its original form, but now he sent his lightning into it as he shouted the command to form into a shield. It blocked Ranma's attacks as he launched himself forward, then under Laxus' command changed into its chain flail format again, the chains exploding in every direction from barely an inch away.

Having expected that Ranma dodged them, but he couldn't then dodge the punch that smashed into his face. Still he rolled with it, bringing one leg up and around in a kick that nearly took Laxus' head off in turn.

"Stop holding back dammit!" Laxus roared, grabbing the leg and then pulling Ranma up into the air and slamming him down into the ground. He then was forced to let go as Ranma's other leg came up in a kick that probably broke a rib, tossing Laxus backwards several feet.

Ranma then flipped, resting on his feet for just a second before lunging forward in a body check at the disoriented Laxus, who grabbed at him, thumping a short jab into Ranma's chest even as he stumbled back. "You asked for it."

The fight sort of devolved from there, as the two of them wailed on one another. But eventually, Laxus went down and Ranma raising his fist triumphantly over his opponent's downed form. *Yes, that was what I wanted, a real trial for my durability. Damn, having my full Dragon Slayer powers is a trip. Still, I won't let it change my style, it's always better to dodge than to take a hit.*

From sidelines where she and Makarov had been watching, Erza smiled at him, clapping her hands twice to show her appreciation. "Well done, though I noted a bit of a change in your normal tactics there."

"Bah, that was freaking nasty," Makarov said bluntly. "Were you two trying to do real damage there?"

"Of course we were old man, that's what a full spar means," Laxus grumbled, pushing himself to his feet and looking up at Ranma. Ranma held out a hand but Laxus just smirked and smacked it away standing up quickly. "I'll be good to go in another hour or so and next time I'm going to win Ranma. And if you hold back again, I'm going to kick you in the nuts."

"Heh, noted," Ranma replied, wincing.

"Excellent," Erza said brightly, and was suddenly holding two spears, shorts hafted spears to be sure, but with heavy heads, one of whom was marked with several glyphs that looked like little lightning marks, while the other one looked like a shorter version of her sea Empress Trident. "In that case, I do believe it's my turn."

"What am I, the new favorite toy that gets passed around by the whole gang?" Ranma muttered.

"Yes," Laxus said with a toothy grin. "You're new, you're tough as fucking hell and training against you is going to make us stronger and more skilled. Did you think Natsu and Gajeel would be the only ones to feel like that?"

Ranma shook his head and smirked, "That wasn't a complaint. That was simply an observation." He moved to stand across from Erza, cracking his knuckles. "Ready when you are darling."

"Darling?" Erza groaned. "Really?"

“Hey, trying to find a pet name is hard!” Ranma said defensively, his shoulders hunching. “I can think of titles easily enough, but nicknames, those are kind harder, and you already shot Red down on the trip into Joya.”

“How about just Erza, it’s who I am after all,” Erza replied with a groan, while nearby Juvia and Jenny both scowled from where they had caught up with the others. Nicknames were special after all.

“How about Valkyrie then,” Ranma said with a laugh. “That says what and who you are both.”

She rolled her eyes, but didn’t object. And as they clashed Ranma whispered, “**My** Valkyrie.”

Erza’s smile was so wide it nearly split her face, but that didn’t stop her from trying to push him off balance, as her second spear came up in a short economical tab, then flipped in her hand to be thrust forward under her arm as she twisted around. Ranma hadn’t run into anyone who used two spears like this before, but it was enough like a two sword technique that he adapted quickly, and the two of them spent around 45 minutes going back and forth.

This was about 10 minutes longer than Laxus had blasted, and the large blonde growled angrily, cracking his knuckles as he moved forward the second that Erza’s rear touched the ground. “My turn again. And this time, I’ll win!”

“I like hope in a man, hope propels us forward. Keep that hope right up until kissing dirt again,” Ranma said, cracking his shoulder where Erza had landed one last blow from the butt of her weapon. That had freaking hurt, even through his newfound durability. *Fuck me, is she somehow using her magical reserves to change the density of her muscles like our Dragon Slayer’s magic does to me and the others?*

Ranma won the next two matches against Laxus and then Erza. But in the third match, Laxus scored his first win of the day and next, Erza capitalized on Ranma’s slowly draining endurance. The bouts against her took more time than with Laxus, but that was because she was trying to draw them out, trying to force Ranma to expand more endurance, playing a strategic rather than tactical game.

Despite that, he made her pay for it, and both of them were gasping, laid out in the ground not a minute after Ranma had tapped out having been floored by a roundhouse kick that had rattled his teeth in his skull.

“Damn me, but you all play a lot more brutally than I would prefer any of my children to, S-class or no,” Makarov shook his head, one enlarged hand pressing Gajeel and Natsu into the forest floor. the two of them had attempted to join the last match as Jenny had stopped sparring with them, but Makarov had stopped them. “And that goes for you two buffoons too.

If you want to fight fine but know when to stop before blood is really spilled. Fight like you and Gray do Natsu, not like this.”

“I actually agree with that,” Ranma interjected. “The two of you need more training in styles and technique than anything else. I mean, you saw how often each of us changed how we fought, our styles and tactics. That goes beyond choosing what kind of attack to use,” Erza said, nodding. Ranma and Laxus both nodded too, ignoring the looks of betrayal that Natsu was shooting at them.

Ranma then turned with a smile as Juvia stepped forward, holding several large boxes. She had been sparring with the two Dragon Slayers and Jenny. All of them were scuffed and bruised, but not nearly as much as the others. “Juvia has lunch everyone, come and eat.”

She laid it out in front of them, and the others closed quickly, more than Ranma’s stomach rumbling in delight at the food laid out there. Even Erza showed less than her normal excellent manners, giving her appetite full rein. Ranma smiled at the cook and Juvia quickly sat down, before Jenny could take their place.

He hadn’t sparred with Jenny. Instead, she had finished with Juvia and engaged him in a conversation before the last bout with Erza, talking about how she needed more help in building up her magical endurance. She had a lot of experience and style: as an S-class mage, she had been on as many combat missions as she had modeling gigs. And beyond those, she had fought Mira several dozen times. She now sat next to Juvia, looking her up and down, and then seeming to nod in approval. “Damn, Ranma sure attracts the cream of the crop, doesn’t he?”

Juvia blushed at the complement but nodded firmly at the insinuation that she was interested in Ranma.

“That was a lot of fun,” Laxus said laying out on the grass nearby. “A few days of that a week, and I think we’ll start to see results quickly.”

Ranma nodded, since these bouts actually did something for him too. While he’d had a few weeks of training his body to automatically shift from using ki to using magic or even using both at the same time, all that training had disappeared during his time in the alternate universe. He had to start from scratch, but thankfully not from the level of building up control. His ki was still working well with his magic, no longer seeing it as a foreign virus that had to be fought.

As they ate, Jenny kept on talking to Ranma about new Mecha Souls she could call on, getting several ideas of mechanized concepts to reach out to, one of whom took her interest almost immediately. The mix of speed and hitting power greatly interested her, as well as the ability to seamlessly shift from running to parkour to flying for short amounts of time. That, and the fact that most of her own already discovered forms relied on cutting type attacks,

cutting beam or long-range attacks. This one relied on blunt attacks and also had a built-in long-range attack to go with it.

“That only leaves me with the problem of magical endurance,” Jenny said with a sigh. “I have no idea what this new form will take, but my most powerful forms are, well, they’re energy intensive to an insane degree.” She looked over at Makarov. “Master, I don’t suppose you know how to activate someone’s Second Origin do you? Master Bob talked about it a time or two, but he never told me how to do it.”

“I’ve heard that phrase before and read about it in Iceberg I think,” Ranma said thoughtfully. “Typhon said that he thought my life energy was housed in the Second Origin or whatever. Not certain I’m remembering that right, but I know it’s supposed to be some kind of second magical reserve, right?”

“Thank God for that,” Laxus muttered. “You’re already a beast, I don’t want to see what you’d be like with a Second Origin as well.”

Ranma mock-pouted at that, but looked over as Makarov explained that yes, he could activate a poor person Second Origin, but he would only do so for S class mages. “And while you were an S class mage for Blue Pegasus, you are not one for Fairy Tail. We have much higher standards, and you will have to go through the S class exam. I’ll sign you up for it immediately, but you’ll still need to prove yourself in the time-honored tradition of the Guild.”

Jenny’s pouted, then leaned over, putting her arms in front of her in a V-shape in order to emphasize her chest and how open her shirt was. “Are you sure you can’t make an exception, for little old me~?” she asked, her full bottom lip thrust out just slightly in what could only be called a sexy pout. The final touch was Jenny letting her sweat-matted hair drop down to one side of her face.

Makarov stared at her as his nose began to bleed, dying the snow beneath him red before he shook his head and turned away, blood still trickling down his nose. “Never! You will not convince me with your wide eyes, your amazing face or your huff and puffs, I will stay strong, strong in the face of your blandishments!”

“I don’t think he’s using that word properly,” Erza replied dryly.

Jenny pouted and straightened up, before leaning into Juvia, putting her arms around the girl and squeezing. “What about you water girl, do you think you’ll be able to become an S-class mage?”

“Perhaps, in time at any rate. However, while Juvia was part of the Element Four, after interacting with the S-class mages and regular mages of Fairy Tail, Juvia has to say that Juvia does not think that any of us were at that level. Gajeel might be, or and will certainly become so eventually under Ranma’s training but the others were not very powerful or versatile in their

magics, while Juvia was also not strong enough. Juvia is getting better, but Juvia is not there yet,” Juvia replied, pushing Jenny out of her personal space gently.

“Don’t sell yourself short my dear,” Makarov said, gleefully hopping over into her lap, reaching over with an elongated hand to fondle her chest for a moment before leaping away as she stiffened in shock. “You might not be an S-class mage yet, but you’re certainly an S-class in looks just like dear Jenny!”

Ranma smacked the older man out of the sky almost absentmindedly shaking his head as Jenny said, “Man, I wish I could use my Second Origin now,” Jenny uttered with a pout. “Still, I’ll admit that the whole S-class test isn’t the most irritating tradition I’ve come across. Did you know that Master Bob has a test to enter the guild?”

“No, does he?” Makarov asked, frowning. “Wait, your guild only takes mages sixteen and over, right?”

“Wait, that short little pretty boy can’t be more than fourteen, if that!” Ranma exclaimed in shock.

They made an exception for him but considering he had worked at a brothel for a few years, I think it was warranted,” Jenny said with a sigh. She’d miss Eve, but there was no doubt his upbringing had given him a very odd view of the world.

“What did you just say?” Laxus said sharply, while everyone, even Natsu and Gajeel, looked shocked.

“Yeah, don’t let his innocent looks fool you, he’s probably more experienced than Ren and Hibiki put together. Just remember it wasn’t wholly ever his choice, it was just what he had to do in order to get by.” That caused them all to wince understanding and Jenny went on.

“Anyway, Master Bob takes the prospective guild member out when they first join the Guild, wines and dines them. And I mean he gets us soused, no matter what anyone tries to get out of it. And then he takes embarrassing pictures throughout the night. He chooses the most embarrassing picture and puts it in what Blue Pegasus calls ‘the vault of shame,’ and you must work off the price of not distributing the others to your guildmates by completing your missions without mishap. If you do, he hands you a picture per mission. He doesn’t withhold money or anything, it’s just in relation to complaints. But even so it was hilarious occasionally when someone failed a mission.”

She scowled then. “As for the picture in the vault, he keeps them there as a sort of memorabilia whatever happens. Heck I didn’t actually get him to agree to hand mine over when I told him I wanted to change guilds. And my picture is... never mind,” she cut herself off, looking at all the suddenly interested faces around her. “Anyway, I was going to head back there anyway to pick up my furniture. I might swing by and give it another try.”

“Sounds like a fun picture whatever it is,” Ranma said with a laugh. Now I really want to steal it.”

After a moment’s thought, Jenny replied, “I’d be down with that so long as you burn it after looking. And if you help me transport my furniture.”

“In that case, maybe we should leave now?” Ranma asked, hopping to his feet, his bento spotlessly clean in front of him.

She looked at him quizzically and he shrugged. “Well we’re going to be getting even more snow over the next few days, right?” He inquired gesturing around them to the snow on the ground and the breath in their bodies. “Travelling now would be fine but moving once there’s a foot or so of snow on the ground would just be annoying.”

“Point,” Jenny said with a nod. She stood up lithely, stretching her arms above her head and winking at the others around them. “In that case, I’ll head back now, take a shower, get changed, and meet you at the outskirts of Magnolia, okay?”

Nodding once, Ranma looked over at Erza, a question plain on his face, though it wasn’t quite the one he voiced. “Unless there’s anything anyone else wants to say right now?”

Erza looked a little pensive, but shrugged, waving one hand at him. “Go on. I had you pretty much to myself most of the time when we were in Edolas, and if Jenny and you wish to see if you’re compatible, you should give her at least some attention.”

Ranma winced a little, shaking his head. “That sounds so clinical.”

“I didn’t mean it that way,” Erza said suddenly looking a little abashed, a **very** unusual look for her. “I just meant, well, Jenny’s a nice girl, and she’s wanted to see if the two of you could get together for a while. It just seems... rude, I suppose? To put my own needs in front of hers.”

While Makarov began to giggle in the background, Laxus shook his head, and turned away muttering “I’m not listening to this conversation.” Not for the first time seeing Ranma’s romantic entanglements, Laxus wasn’t certain if he was just disturbed, amused, or damn jealous of the other young man. But at least Mira’s not interested in him any longer, and he hasn’t seemed to attract all that many other girls, just S-class mages mostly. What is up with that?”

Jenny on the other hand looked at Erza, and then allowed her expression to shift into the same sultry, oversexed look she had adopted to tease Makarov with earlier. Reaching over, she whispered into Erza’s ear, “Are you sure you’re not putting your desires in there as well, Mis~tress~?”

The way she said the word 'Mistress' was positively sinful, and Erza blushed as hotly as her hair. She then Re-quipped a sword and chopped where Jenny had been a second ago. "V, Vile temptress!"

"...I don't think I want to know what Jenny just said to her, do I?" Ranma said, shaking his head as he looked at Erza as she hopped to her feet and made to follow Jenny who had danced just out of range. Jenny had spoken so low that even his enhanced senses hadn't been able to pick it up.

"She said nothing, you hear me, nothing!" Erza shouted having discerned Ranma's interest. If anything, her face had reddened even further.

"Nothing he needs to know about just yet~," Jenny caroled, before quickly transforming into one of the Take Over Mechanical Souls that allowed her to fly, pushing up into the air and away as Erza came after her growling incoherently as she chopped through several trees.

The fact Erza had done so with a simple sword, and no extra armor other than her normal day-to-day armor, caused Gajeel to gulp. "Damn! Is she really that strong, or is that a magic sword?"

"No dude, that's just her. I've been over this before, precisely what about the women in my guild being freaking scary is still not fitting into your brain?" Natsu asked, honestly quizzical at his fellow Dragon Slayer's inability to understand the obvious.

Laxus shook his head, then looked back at his grandfather, dismissing the fight as Jenny continued to run off, Erza remaining behind, her breath coming in gasps as she looked everywhere but at Ranma and the others. "So, Second Origin. How do I do this?"

Makarov sighed, looked over at the two Dragon Slayers who were now looking as if they were trying to not be obvious about listening in. Without warning he shifted into his Titan form, and grabbed both of them shouting, "Back to Magnolia for you two!" He then threw them in the general direction of the town like small Ping-Pong balls.

Then he turned back to his grandson, muttering, "Come on. Erza, do you want to know about this too?"

Erza nodded firmly and was suddenly holding the sword that Belserion had changed into, holding it up. "I want to have enough magic that I can use this freely, along with the rest of my weapons and armors." Erza had woken Belserion up only once since she, Ranma and the others had left the cave.

"Come on then," Makarov said with a sigh grumbling imprecations under his breath.

Ranma shook his head, and made his own way back to Magnolia, a new sort of excitement building in him as he thought about taking to the road again with Jenny. It would certainly be interesting, even if it was going to be a very short trip and not for just the most obvious reason either.

Moments later Ranma was back in Magnolia looking for Wendy. He found her in the guildhall with Levy, going over something with the other bluenette, while nearby Freed seemed to be going over the same thing, or perhaps another version of it. "What're you up to Wendy?" Ranma said looking over her shoulder.

"Eeep!" Levy gasped, while Freed jumped and gasped, grabbing at his chest. "How, where did you, wh..."

"Oh, just something I thought up, Ranma-nii," Wendy said, ignoring the other two's reaction to his sudden arrival. After all, she had seen him enter the hall, and it wasn't like jumping from the entrance to here was all that hard. *Maybe it was just because he was quiet?* "It's a mix of Levy's Solid Script and Freed's Rune magic. I was thinking of ways to refill our magic and wondered if maybe we could somehow store some Solid Script letters to be used later."

"Right," Levy said, writing out the word air and laughing as Wendy very visibly stopped herself from hopping over the table to eat it. Apparently, the little girl thought Levy's magic made her Air Solid Script technique very tasty. "But my Solid Script doesn't last very long. So, we're trying to think of the proper runes to store them. Or if not the words themselves, at least the magic inherent in them and the element - like the magical air - in a sealed package. But it's proving to be a little more difficult than we thought."

"Mm. Still it was only a passing thought to pass the time, since I've got training with Porlyusica starting tomorrow morning!" Wendy nearly squealed in delight, hugging Carla, who had been sitting next to her, tightly. "She sent one of those messenger birds saying she expected me to show up promptly at nine in the morning, but we're finally going to start training in the moves my Mama left with her."

"Hmm..." Ranma hummed, cocking his head as he saw how excited his little sister was about that idea. "So, you wouldn't want to put that off and come with me on a short trip? Jenny wanted to head back to her former town and the apartment she had there. After all, now the town's rebuilt and all, she can move in here formerly."

"MMm... no I don't think so. Sorry Ranma-nii, but this is... well it's really important to me, more important than even getting better at healing magic. These attacks, my Mama left them behind for me personally. I want to learn them because they are a part of her, you know?" Wendy said, her tone firm even if she didn't seem quite able to pick out the words she wanted to use to get her point across.

"I can understand that Wendy-chan. But we might be gone for a few days." When Wendy nodded, Ranma smiled, feeling a bit of pride filling him, as well as a bit of sadness. After all, it hadn't been so long ago that Wendy wouldn't have wanted to be apart from him even for a single night. And now here she was, willing to stay with just Carla rather than miss out of special training. *Damn, put that way you can seriously see how much like me she's grown, can't ya?* "Will you want your stuff from the tent, or do you want to stay at Fairy Hills? I'll leave some money for food and stuff with you, Carla, regardless."

"Of course, just leave it to me you Neanderthal," Carla said, though she too was looking at Wendy with pride in her face. "And I think we will take the time to go shopping. Wasn't there a Wood Make mage here, we could commission her to make us some actual furniture for our apartment."

"Meh, leave that for later, I've got plans for that too, if only the outer patio. You can make plans though if you just want to have the bedroom to yourself."

The cat-girl, who was in her favored human form, nodded brusquely. She had decided recently she wanted to try and wean Wendy away from her midnight cuddling with Ranma, and hoped to use this idea, that of designing their own room, to do so. Although since Wendy was now leaning into Ranma's petting hand she knew it would be an uphill struggle.

About an hour after that, Jenny and Ranma met up at the outskirts of Magnolia. When he showed up, Ranma of course was wearing what he always did, silk pants, undershirt and his Song Silk cloak. Jenny on the other hand wore what looked like a winter style sports outfit under a heavy fur cloak. She had high, fur-lined boots, skintight pants and shirt, with a hood on her head, sunglasses that looked almost like visors along with heavy mittens.

Ranma blinked at her ensemble, frowning. "What? Do you think I look this good without exercising in the winter? Please! I run at least three miles a day, and that's if I'm doing a job that day. If I don't, seven."

Ranma chuckled at that, hopping up and down on his feet. "Huh, in that case, you should probably be used to this kind of weather then. That means I won't have to hold back.

Jenny paled a little and opened her mouth quickly. "Let's not be hasty..." she began, but Ranma had already turned, and was racing out of sight. "God dammit! Take over: Jet skis!" She muttered, transforming into a new Take Over Mecha form that Ranma hadn't ever seen before. Unlike the Take Over form she'd used previously to cover some distance, this one was based solely around her legs, which were suddenly framed in armor from the foot up to the knee. At the back of the legs were a few small jet nozzles, while on the feet were small, two-foot long skis.

While not as fast as her flight type or magical motorcycle form, the jet skis depended just as much on physical strength and fitness as magical power. Further in terms of magical

power it wasn't nearly as expensive to call on. Even with her smaller than normal S-class mage reserves Jenny could use this form for twenty-four hours before feeling the drain.

A second later she was off after Ranma, shouting out, "that's cheating!"

Ranma's laughter reached her through the wind and she grinned despite herself. *Whatever is going to happen between us, it sure as hell isn't going to be dull.*

Jenny and Ranma raced through the winter landscape all afternoon, sometimes with Ranma in the lead, sometimes with Jenny taking the lead. She would have been happier about that, if she thought that she had actually overcome his speed, but she got the distinct impression that Ranma let her do so, more to put her at ease than anything else. Of course, that was nice enough that Jenny decided to reward him a little, and every time she was ahead of him by a few paces or so, she swung her hips just a little bit more. After the first few times Jenny began to do it more often, feeling his gaze on her when she did that like a physical force. Knowing she could have that effect on him, on a man as strong and disciplined as Ranma, was a major turn on.

And yes, Jenny felt he was disciplined. Oh, not in the normal way that word was used. Ranma was personally disciplined, in that he centered himself on his martial arts to an extent that few men could match.

Then Ranma paid the favor back in an utterly insane and over the top manner. While he had gotten used to flirting, he'd flirted most often with Erza while on the road, and well, Erza's method of flirting was just shy of a hammer to the forehead. "God, all this running is making me sweat, and I forgot to bring another shirt along, darn it." He hadn't of course, that was what both his ki space and Requip space was for, and Jenny knew it.

But acknowledging that would ruin the fun. And Jenny would rather have eaten a cactus than ruin the fun as Ranma pulled off his shirt as he ran ahead of her stretching his head this way and that, and then cracking his shoulders. Jenny bit her lip looking at his toned, insanely well-muscled back and sides as he turned, giving her a wink before speeding up once more.

In this manner the two of them ran, talked and flirted throughout the day, pushing well into the night, so that they could get out of the small forest they had been passing through. At that point, Jenny found the train tracks which would take them down to the port, that Erza and the others had used to head to Galuna Island. There was a road leading from thereto the town where Blue Pegasus made its home, although Jenny planned to only follow the train for a few dozen miles before going cross country again to shave off time.

The two mages pushed on for another thirty minutes before they left the last of the trees behind, then cut out and away from the train tracks, putting a small, snow-custed hill

between them and the tracks where Ranma found a place to put up the tent for the night. "Mind you," he teased "I could push on and get there in the morning."

"So could I," Jenny replied, pushing her shoulder against his, still-bare shoulder as they worked together to put up the tent, amusement plain on her features even in the light of the moon. "But why rush when you don't have to? Is my company so horrible?" she added, putting a pout into her voice.

"No, n..." Ranma paused, turning slightly to give her a mock-glare. "I'm not falling for that."

"Darn," Jenny replied, before quickly pushing past him into the tent. She poked her head out before he could follow, winking at him. "I'm going to change, I'm sweaty, and I want to get out of this outfit. So, unless you want to watch, I suggest you stay out here. I'll call you when I'm ready."

"It's my tent you know," Ranma retorted, smirking himself as he leaned in so they were a bare few inches away. "And was that an invitation?"

Jenny laughed, but pulled her head back into the tent without replying.

Staring after her, Ranma thought about it for a minute, then shook his head. *No, despite how comfortable I am with it, Jenny and I just got back into the flirting stage. That would be a bit too far at this point. No matter how much certain parts of me might disagree.*

A few minutes later Jenny's voice rang out from inside the tent, and Ranma entered only to pause, his eyes widening.

"This tent is amazing! Did you get it in Seven? This kind of thing is their specialty isn't it, high end magical appliances and such? And I love the little touches Wendy's added. They're so cute!" Jenny said as she moved around preparing a meal on the small cooker some table sets to one side of the tent.

It was a simple stir-fry, high in protein and vegetables, with some mushrooms that she had brought along in her own Requip space. She'd bought them a few days ago, so they were in danger of going bad if they didn't use them quickly. Besides the stir-fry, she had whipped up some drinks, wine once more from her own stash.

She wasn't much of a drinker, at least in comparison to most models, although she could drink Mira under the table and would fight anyone who said otherwise. But, she wondered if Ranma actually drank at all, and if he did, if it actually gave him any kind of buzz. She honestly doubted it, but it was worth an experiment.

Just like what she was wearing, and she smirked triumphantly as she continued to stir the stir-fry in its skillet, as she heard Ranma gulp behind her.

Ranma stared. That was all he could do at the moment since all higher brain functions had shut down, his brain shifting all his energies to the command 'don't jump her.' The mantra 'it's too soon, it's too soon' was also going through his mind, just like a computer attempting to boot up only to crash at the first line of code.

Jenny had decided to wear a nightgown tonight, but that word just didn't do the thing she was wearing justice. For one thing, it was incredibly slinky, looking like someone had hammered silver cloud into a piece of clothing, not so much hugging her body as gently caressing it. For another it was almost bareback, tied around her waist and behind her head, leaving the majority of her well-muscled back bare to his gaze. Indeed as she moved, he could see along her sides, even catching a glimpse of the under-curve of her breasts.

It ended at the bottom of her rear, showing off the fact that yes indeed, the work Jenny had done on her body had proven very effective. The only pair of legs that Ranma had seen that could be her equal were Erza's, and that was saying something considering Ranma had seen his own legs constantly in female form, as well as Mira's occasionally and several other ladies. Her rear also was a thing of magnificence, small, perky, almost bouncy as she swished it from side to side while moving around the small kitchenette.

When she turned, it was quite clear that she also wasn't wearing a bra underneath, her breasts swaying just slightly, underneath her nightgown. As Ranma had thought, they were smaller than either of the other two ladies he was involved with/going to be involved with/whatever the proper phrasing was for what they were doing. Indeed, though he was never going to say it aloud, they looked a little smaller than Mira's. But what they didn't have in size they made up for in perkiness riding high and proudly on her chest. And the fact that her nipples were hard was extremely easy to see through that slinky thing she was wearing.

Her hair was also down, completely undone, running down her back and shoulders with two bangs in front, loose ringlets of blonde locks that Ranma was dying to wind his fingers through. She smirked, then bit her lip as she saw Ranma's visible reaction to her, before flitting her eyes back up to his face. "Like what you see, I take it?" she teased.

"Woman, you are playing with fire," Ranma muttered, shaking his head. It'd been a long few days since the last time he and Erza had been able to get some time to even have a make-out session, let alone anything more. And with every interaction with Erza or even before her with Bisca, Ranma's desire for **more** grew. It was as if every interaction with the girls beyond flirting knocked a small hole in the dam of his self-control, weakening the entire edifice before the next round of 'attacks.'

She laughed wickedly, then shook her head. "Food first," she ordered. "I didn't just slave over this meal so that it would burn while we got distracted."

"I thought you said you wouldn't want to take it too far so fast," Ranma said slowly, shaking his head to clear it of the image in front of him. Of course, unlike mental images, once he opened his eyes, he saw the same thing in front of him again, but it still worked a bit, and the fact that he was kind of hungry helped. *Thank you Master, you always remind me about what is really important* he thought, patting his stomach before moving over to the small table, sitting on one of the beanbags there.

The fact that this hid his erection was just a side benefit, although Jenny's pout actually made him laugh. Her expression was so over-the-top that it took away from the sexiness of what she was wearing, making it a bit of a joke.

"That's better," Jenny said with a laugh, setting the food down before sitting across from him. "You need to realize Ranma, I am... she paused thinking how to put it. "I am a sensual creature," she explained, gesturing down at herself. "I like relationships. I like being in them, I like flirting, I like knowing that I am desired, not just respected, I know you respect me," she said, looking at him in something like appreciation, but which was much softer than that. It wasn't love exactly, Ranma didn't think that she loved him, not yet, but it felt more than just appreciation or respect.

"I know when a man desires me, and when a man respects me. It's only when those two things meet, that I truly get into it, and decide to let out this side of me," she said gesturing down at herself. "I'm going to want a lot of flirting like we did today when it's just the two of us. I'm going to want attention, but when I do, I'll tell you or, dress up like this. You won't have to do the whole guessing game thing with me," she finished with a laugh.

"'Guessing game thing'?" Ranma asked, then blinked as he it hit him. "Oh yeah, the kind of thing where you ask me if this dress makes you to look too fat, which I'll add the answer would be fuck no, nothing you wear could ever make you look anything less than beautiful," he added hastily.

"Sweet," Jenny replied with a noticeable blush under the light of the lady-bug lacrima at the offhand yet heartfelt comment. "And yes, that's exactly the kind of thing I'm thinking. When I'm in a relationship Ranma I don't do that shit. A lot of women do, and that's fine for them. Me, I prefer to be straightforward. If I want you to pamper me, I'll tell you so. If I want an honest opinion about something I want to wear, I'll tell you that too. If I want to feel sexy, and know you desire me, I will bring out those emotions," she whispered, her lips twisting into a sensual smile that set Ranma's blood to pacing and to flowing back downwards again.

"D, duly noted," Ranma said with a nod. "And if I say that you know I'm not in the mood, or I have more serious things on my mind or something?"

"Tell me about it," Jenny said with a nod. "I'll play games when I'm flirting with you Ranma, I'll play games in public, teasing and cajoling, getting a reaction from you or others. I won't play games with our emotions, and I know full well when it's time to be serious."

Ranma nodded. "Sounds good to me." With the ice broken – or perhaps lit on fire – the two of them tucked into the food, talking companionably about the training session earlier that day Jenny was determined to figure out how to access her Second Origin, which was even more understandable in her case than Laxus or Erza, since she had smaller reserves to begin with. Ranma gave her a few ideas about meditations to do in order to gain better control of her magic so she could do more with less, but there wasn't much more that could be done in that area.

From there the conversations shifted Wendy's additions to the tent and Ranma told Jenny about 'Rules of Brothering.' After she finished laughing at a few of the stories about how he'd come up with them they began to clean up the meal, which had been simple, but quite good for that.

During this process Ranma found himself behind Jenny, and, considered her words earlier. He decided to act on them, reaching around her, and gently putting his hands on the front of her bare thighs.

She didn't stop moving, but despite the fact that he couldn't see it, Ranma could almost feel her smile. "And what are you going to do now that you have me in your clutches?" she asked in a low tone.

Lime Start

"Nothing you don't want me to do," Ranma said, then feeling greatly daring he laid a kiss on the side of her head right behind her ear, needing to move her hair to do it. "How fast we go, so long as it isn't too fast, I'll leave up to you."

In response, a smiling Jenny cocked her head, and since this moved her hair out of the way Ranma took his cue, and moved down her neck, shuddering almost against her as he felt how soft and smooth her skin was under his lips. "Jesus..." he muttered, his voice low and throaty.

Jenny could feel her nipples harden again at the raw desire that Ranma had allowed to showing that one word. Who this Jesus character was, Jenny didn't know and frankly she didn't care. None of her previous boyfriends had allowed that much of their desire for her to show so early. She'd had to do quite a bit more to get to that level with them. When he slowed his ministrations after a few seconds, she was able to concentrate again on the words he said before she had given in that invitation. "I won't push you," she said with a slow nod, being very careful not to dislodge Ranma's lips from her neck, where they had just found one of her sweet spots. *Holy hell, is he reading me?!*

Ranma was indeed reading her. He had gotten used to trying to translate his ability to read opponents into this kind of thing with Erza on their trip, having first experimented with her and Bisca during their time in northern Desierto.

"I won't push although you should get used to the idea that we'll be doing something like this pretty darn often, she said with a low chuckle, which somehow sent a surge of heat down Ranma's spine. "But, I won't push you to go all the way with me. You are a virgin right?" She asked bluntly.

Ranma blinked, pulled away from her neck to look at the back of her head in shock, and Jenny turned to look at him quizzically "What?"

"You just, um okay, yes I am I guess," Ranma muttered. "It's, well, it's just the first time someone's out right asked though."

"Like I said, I don't like to beat around the bush so much. It wastes time. And more importantly, I would lay dollars to donuts that, while I doubt she has the physical evidence of it, Erza most certainly is one too. And first times should be shared, between lovers if possible. At least, that's what I've heard. My first time was with a somewhat more experienced person, and it was not as good as I expected," Jenny said with a sigh. "Experience is all well and good, it tells you what you like and what you don't like, but it also can sort of make a person demanding, taking the lead so to speak, when it's better to give-and-take."

Ranma nodded, then leaned forward, kissing her lips very lightly, before pulling back. "I can agree with that, but I think that's enough talking about the future," he gently lifted his hands from her thighs up her front, letting them rest just below her silk clad breasts, his thumb gently playing with the under-curve of her breasts.

"Definitely," she murmured, turning fully around in his arms to reach up and pull him down into a kiss that went on for quite some time. Jenny had to break off first to gasp, licking her lips in delight as she breathed in deeply, her chest heaving, her silk-clad breasts rubbing up and down Ranma's own silk-clad chest. *Oh yes, more of that please* she thought, even as Ranma leaned down and began to lick and nibble at her throat his teeth grazing her jugular, then up, to nibble on one of her ears.

He didn't linger there long, Jenny's ears weren't actually all that sensitive, unlike Erza's. Her throat on the other hand was very sensitive, and she began to let out little cooing noises as he worked. Indeed, her entire neck was sensitive and Ranma began to languidly lay kisses all along her shoulders, through her silk negligée, and then up to just below her ears before going back down, around and up again to her lips as he felt Jenny had finished regaining her breath.

Jenny kissed back just as passionately and this time opened her mouth slightly, letting her pink tongue flick out just as they were breaking off again, to run up and across Ranma's lips. Ranma opened his lips in turn and actually caught her tongue with his lips, before letting out his tongue to play, licking at the underside and then all around her tongue as they kissed passionately.

Now Jenny began to moan, and Ranma felt her hands go down to his rear, gripping it hard. But Ranma didn't do the same. Considering how short her negligée was he figured that would be a step too far. Jenny however took one of his hands from the small of her back, and very firmly dragged it down to her rear, patting it as she released it there.

Then she went back to his own rear with one hand, digging the fingers of his other hand into his hair. The feel of that caused Ranma to shudder, then he remembered something he had wanted to do the moment he entered the tent and seen Jenny's hair undone.

He moved his hands from the small of her back and her rear up to her hair. Jenny might have muttered a protest into the kiss, but then Ranma's hands were in her hair. One was just playing with the end of it, while the others started to stroke her scalp, kneading her skin and feeling her hair at the same time while also using the grip this allowed him to become a bit more forceful in his kiss. In reply Jenny moaned, the sensation of that touch filling her, until she could only gasp into the kiss, breaking it off to moan loudly.

Ranma left off for a brief second, putting his arms around Jenny's waist and lifting her slightly off of the ground, taking two steps backwards and flopping down into a beanbag, with Jenny in his lap. She moved with it, putting both her legs on either side of him, and very deliberately rubbing her silk-clad core against his waist where she could feel his shaft, like a steel pipe had been put pressed between them. She humped against it slowly, then twitched her hips around in a circle, and now it was Ranma's turn to gasp, pulling away from her lips to throw his head back at the feelings running him.

Thanks to that Jenny slowly regained control of their kiss, and the two of them made out for a time, simply moving against one another like this.

There was no urgency in their movements, there was no sense they had to hurry to the end. The feelings within them built slowly over many minutes, until Jenny came with a long languid sigh as she broke away the kiss to lean against Ranma's shoulder, her entire body trembling in aftershocks. Those aftershocks and the feel of her body shuddering against him threw Ranma over the edge too, and he grunted as he came, the already extremely damp pants and panties between them becoming even more damp as he discharged in his pants.

End Lime

After a few seconds to recover, Ranma stared down her body and in between them, muttering "well, that's one pair of pants that're going to need cleaning. A lot of cleaning."

Jenny giggled against his chest, sighing faintly *oh yes, definitely a keeper* she thought to herself, as she felt his arms around her.

The next day, Ranma woke up to Jenny hugging him like an octopus. She was still leaning against his chest with a smile on her face, it looked as if it would have to be surgically

removed. Which would be a crime Ranma reflected, given how angelic she looked at the moment.

As he watched she nuzzled against him even more, murmuring happily about him being warm under her breath. It was true, Ranma knew his body temperature ran quite a bit higher than most but that was neither here nor there. The sight of Jenny, acting so cute was attractive if he was honest. It was extremely at odds with her normal appearance, but for all of that, Ranma could certainly see the connection there and had to smile at the feel of her arms around him. *So, she's a cuddler then? Good to know. I bet she and Wendy would get along well sleeping together.*

Thanks to Wendy, Ranma had a lot of experience with cuddlers, although cuddling with a full-sized woman was somewhat new. He couldn't remember what sleeping next to Bisca had been like that first drunken night together, but Erza hadn't been much of a cuddler when they had made their way into Joya. She'd wanted her space even when they were sharing sleeping bags, although she would normally take one of his hands and hers or lean her head against his shoulder.

Like Wendy before her Jenny hugged with her entire body, her arms around his shoulders and her legs tangled up in his, while Ranma's own arm was around her shoulders, the other resting side and hip. It was an extremely nice feeling however, that didn't mean that they could just lay there all day.

He moved his hands from where he had wound his fingers through her hair and hip to stroke up her sides several times before tracing up to her cheek, tapping it with two fingers. "Jenny, come on, it's morning."

She blinked, opened her eyes and peered up at him, before a smile appeared on her face. It was sleepy, but still had in common with the smile she been wearing than her normal teasing expression. She leaned forward, and kissed him, causing Ranma to flinch away at the morning breath.

She giggled at that, then pulled her arms from around him, stretching languidly. "Right, since I made dinner last night does that mean you get you breakfast? Or do you want to make lunch?"

"Not dinner," he asked.

She shook her head. "No, we should be back at Blue Pegasus's hometown before dinner."

Ranma watched as she continued to stretch, the sight innocent somehow yet oh-so-sexy. "I think," he said through suddenly dry lips "I think that I will take breakfast. You can take lunch, although if you intend us to have any time to get to your town, I suggest you wear

normal clothing while doing so, I will not be held accountable for my actions if you're wearing that nighty in the next five minutes," he added with a smirk, deliberately letting his fingers slide down to rest on one of Jenny's nipples over the sleeping shift, which hardened under his touch, as he gently circled it.

"R, right," she said, standing up quickly. "None of that, we both have... actually," she leaned over, sniffing his breath with a faint frown. "You don't have morning breath. You'll have to teach me that trick.

"It helps not drinking before bed," Ranma said with a laugh. "Fruit infused water is best, and of course brushing your teeth."

"Hey do you think I don't brush my teeth?" Jenny asked, her fingers twitching dangerously.

"No, I'm just saying that's part of my solution to morning breath that's all."

Jenny continued to glare at him, then with a huff, brought up her foot and gently pushed at his chest, smirking a little as she felt the muscles there not give an inch.

But Ranma quickly grabbed her foot, and began to tickle it mercilessly, causing her to whoop and almost fall backwards. He was up on his own feet and moving over to the kitchen, before she could recover, and he smirked over his shoulder at her. "Your wish is my command, Your highness."

She scowled, but the scowl soon faded into a smile that was remarkably like the one she had worn during the night as she watched him cook. *Yep, even if I have to share or give the prime position to Erza this is just too damn nice. Serious, funny, goofy, teasing, sexy as fuck, not intimidated or with any desire to try to control me. And he not only cooks but is good with kids. Or a kid anyway. Ranma's definitely a keeper.*

Their trip continued after breakfast, the two of them actually making a game of it, seeing which of them could cover such and such distance faster, who could leap further, and so forth. Eventually, they came to the point where Jenny led Ranma away from the train tracks they had been following that morning, on an angle to cut cross country in a straight line to the town where Blue Pegasus made its home. The two of them arrived at the outskirts of the town a little after lunchtime.

"I think that we can take it easy for now," Jenny said as they slowed down. She unequipped her Take Over form, standing there in the same clothing she had worn when they started out only in different colors. "You want to get lunch, or do you want to head to my apartment and get all the workout of the way?"

“Whichever,” Ranma said with a grin. “This is your show Jenny, so you call the shots. Just don’t get used to it,” he finished with a wink.

Jenny giggled, while turning away to hide a blush wondering suddenly if Ranma had learned or somehow had been there when she and Erza had a conversation that was basically on that very subject. She didn’t think so, but that joke made her wonder for a brief second before putting it down to paranoia...and the idea of Ranma being in charge of her to a bit of misplaced fantasy.

Still, she decided they could head to her apartment, and have a light lunch there before packing everything up and heading out to dinner tonight. “There’s a seafood restaurant in this town that I think is one of the best in Fiore and trust me I’ve eaten at a lot of restaurants in my time as a model.”

“Oh, is that why you’re so manic about exercise then?” Ranma teased.

“I don’t know, has it worked?” she asked saucily, running her hands down her sides as she looked at him challengingly. Ranma nodded, and she smiled back before leading the way through the town.

As they went Jenny garnered the normal smiles and nods from the townsfolk that any well liked or respected mage would in their hometown along with more than a few dozen fans of her personally. Of course most of those were men, and all of them asked if she was going to be headlining the Blue Pegasus guild tonight until they saw the mark on her shoulder, then they switched to asking if she was going to be still appearing at all. When she said she wasn’t, their smiles turned to frowns, but Jenny kept moving, not allowing them to pin her down and ask her why that was.

“So, it’s not just because you wanted to continue to actually use your mage skills for something other than looking pretty huh,” Ranma muttered, gesturing back to a clump of frowning men who were staring after them. “Or would you call this a symptom of that?”

“I’d probably call it a symptom,” Jenny replied, sighing faintly. “I suppose it’s the part of the curse of getting to be known so well for one thing. A lot of people don’t realize that you’re, well, more than that thing.” She looked at him slyly. “Maybe you should think about that, Mister martial artist and combat junkie.”

Ranma huffed, but didn’t rise to her challenge, simply shaking his head. The two of them continued through the town quickly arriving at her apartment. When they entered, Ranma whistled, “Y’know, Carla was saying something about making more use of the actual apartment we bought rather than just the kitchen and our one sofa. If she wants to follow up on that I am so paying you to do the interior design.”

Jenny blushed at that, but also smiled, thanking him for the compliment, thinking she had gotten more compliments in the past few days for things other than her beauty than she had in a long while before that. That thought was somewhat annoying though, so she set it aside to watch as Ranma looked around.

The interior of Jenny's apartment was pretty incredible to Ranma's mind. It mixed what in his old world would've been called the modern style - metal and ceramics - with different types of plants here and there. The kitchen was entirely modern, as were the sofas, composing of red and black leather with metal frame. Her bed was a raised bed sticking out along one of the inner walls and made to look like a tree almost, while underneath it was her bookcase and dresser. There were four hanging vine plants, in different areas of the room, which gave off a very nice smell, and the lampposts were designed to look like cages encasing the lacrima lights. It was quite frankly darn cool in Ranma's opinion.

After looking around, Ranma asked, "So how much of this stuff do you want to keep? I'm good enough with martial arts construction to deconstruct most of this if that's what you want."

Jenny nodded firmly, and after a light lunch the two of them worked through the rest of that afternoon well into the evening time. The only things that Jenny wasn't taking were the kitchen and bathroom appliances, the toilet, the cabinets the freezer and such. All of that had come complete with the apartment, which had added to the rent of the place. "Although, judging by what Erza mentioned that the night we went drinking together, I don't think even then I was paying nearly as much rent as I will be if I move into Fairy Hills.

"And are you?"

"Nope," Jenny denied with a smile. "I've already got a place picked out."

Ranma paused as he finished stuffing the sofa into his Requip space, turning narrow eyes on Jenny asking warily, "Where?"

"Why with you of course. You'd said a few hours ago that you don't actually use that apartment all that much except as a place to stow your tent and that Carla was interested in making more use of it. When I was in it the other day, I was imagining what I could do with it."

Ranma rolled his eyes, but wondering if she was joking or not replied with, "If you can get Erza to agree, we'll see."

"Oh, the redhaired mistress will agree, I might have to let her 'show me my place' first though," she said to herself, in a low tone that he probably wasn't supposed to hear.

Despite Jenny's whispering Ranma still did hear some of that however and blinked, mentally debating on whether or not to call her out on that phrase. Then he decided he really didn't want to know about it right now.

Instead, the two of them finished unhooking the lights from the walls, removing them entirely and then packing up the plants in especially designed magical containers, which would keep them warm and for the trip. They still went within Ranma's Requip space of course but living things couldn't be put in Requip space without that kind of preparation.

At last they were done, with Jenny packing up the last of her toiletries, which was itself something of a large bundle, and Ranma laughed looking at it. "Are you still going to use all those products? I mean, ya won't be prettying yourself up for modeling gigs any longer, and it ain't like you need them all that much anyway."

"Hell yes," Jenny said with a laugh, standing up and doing a little twirl in place, gesturing down at herself even as she preened internally at the offhand comment. "This might be good for around the apartment here, but when I go out, I like to look good as I told you. And all those products, were free anyway!" she added wickedly.

Ranma blinked, staring at the bundle in new interest. "How?"

"Mira, Anna and I were the top three models in Ishgar you know," Jenny revealed, pulling her hair down to one side of her face and winking at him coquettishly before laughing as he shook his head with a grin and a very light blush. "People were always giving us free samples of their stuff, and both myself and Mira made deals out of it, we did a few advertisements for their stuff and we got free product for a year. That hair stuff I use, that's one example from it."

Ranma nodded slowly. "I might ask you for some of that stuff. If I ever have to use my female form again to sneak around, that could be a major help."

"Done, so long as I get to help you do your hair. She gestured to hair Ranma's here now, leaning forward and brought running her hand fingers through it. Even in male form your hair is nice," she said with a laugh as Ranma closed his eyes, leaning into the touch.

She pulled back reluctantly, then smiled at him. "Now, I think we deserve some dinner."

"Seafood's cool," Ranma said with a nod. "Although I would've thought that my being the Water Dragon Slayer my liking seafood would've been assumed."

Jenny shook her head. "Nope, I remember taking Anna out to this restaurant once, did you know that she is almost violently allergic to shellfish?" Jenny was on surprisingly good terms with Mira's little sister, who had never been part of the rivalry between her older sibling and the blonde model.

“No but it’s good to know in the future. I figure I might at some point be cooking for them and Natsu at some point,” Ranma said, bowing towards her and then gesturing towards the bathroom. “Ladies first.”

“But that would just mean I’d have to get a glass of water for you to qualify, wouldn’t it?” Jenny inquired but she was already moving in the direction of the bathroom, and closed it before Ranma’s retaliation of a flung slipper could reach her.

About half an hour later Jenny stepped out of the bathroom dressed to the nines, in a light blue dress, which left her shoulders bare but hugged her midriff and chest, flowing down to just below her knee, flaring out to allow for a wide range of movement. She had a pink flower once more in her hair, some lipstick on as well as eyeliner, and a tiny bit of rouge on her cheeks. Her stockings were white and came up to just below her dress.

“Damn,” Ranma cursed, shaking his head. “Are you trying to get us mobbed?”

“Remember what I said last night,” Jenny laughed, smiling happily at his reaction even as she moved behind him and began to push Ranma towards the bathroom. “I like being looked at. Then she abruptly put her arms around him, whispering into his ear “but you’re the only boy who I want to **touch** me right now. So if you don’t like my look, I’ll change, just so long as your eyes remain on me the entire night.”

“A, as if they’d be an, anywhere else,” Ranma said his voice stuttering if only slightly.

She released him and gave him a push in the back again. “Good answer. Now, go to make yourself pretty. I’m expecting you to give me just as good a level of eye candy as I am you, you know.”

Rolling his eyes again Ranma entered the bathroom and came out in under fifteen minutes. But while Ranma was fully dressed to the nines in a very good tuxedo sans a tie, Ranma had also changed into his female form.

Looking the shorter redhead over Jenny moved around Ranma, nodding in approval. “I like it. I like it a lot. It isn’t showing off your curves or anything but you certainly have them, and it gives off the air of a dressed-up tomboy almost. Neat. But can I ask, why the change? I would have thought you’d spent enough time in your female form in Edolas.”

“Yeah well, it kind of occurred to me that, well...look, me and the curse, we’re a package deal, ya know. We can’t exactly be separated. And while you once said you didn’t have a problem with this form, that was kind of a lukewarm response, ya know. So, EEK!”

Before Ranma could go on, Jenny had reached over and pulled the shorter redhead into a hug, her breasts pushing down into Ranma’s own before she tilted her head to the side and leaned down, capturing Ranma’s lips in a kiss. Those lips were much softer, and Ranma didn’t

seem to be able to get over his shock as quickly as he would have in his male body, but eventually Ranma got into the kiss enough to make Jenny hum in appreciation. She then slowly pulled back, licking some excess saliva away as she did, sending a smoldering look down at the redhead. "Whatever form, you're still Ranma, darling. So, I'm down with that. Hell, I wouldn't be nearly as happy to try to share you if that were the case. I think at this point with the girls who you're interested in you can take it as a given that the curse doesn't matter at all, okay?"

"Umma, bubb, ah, okay," Ranma babbeled, shaking his head from side to side in order to regain some poise and succeeding only somewhat. "Um I'll remember that. Er, should we go, or do ya want to redo your lipstick first?"

Jenny blinked looked past Ranma into the bathroom and the mirror there before scowling. "Right, redo the lipstick. Be right back Ranma."

After a few seconds spent in the bathroom Jenny was back and the two girls walked out of the apartment arm in arm. They found the restaurant quickly enough, and thanks to Jenny being who she was, they got a seat easily despite it being a very high-end restaurant where normally they'd need reservations.

However, that was the time the date went Ranma-shaped, as he later called it. Because there were a few other members of her ex-guild there, including Ren and Hibiki.

"Oh, no," Jenny muttered. "I'd hoped not to cause a scene here. Darn it, why aren't they at the guildhall? Of all the nights for them to be out on the town rather than hosting at the guild."

"Jenny," called the chief pretty boy, coming over and bowing deeply over her hand as Ranma and Jenny were about to sit down. "You are looking as lovely as ever. And might I say the red and black of your tuxedo goes amazingly well with your hair, my dear," he went on, addressing Ranma. "I'm Hibiki, if our lovely Jenny has not yet introduced us. How do you do?"

Ren scowled, placing a bottle of wine on the table between the two ladies. "Don't think I picked this out special for you, or anything. This is just a courtesy to a friend of our guildmate."

Staring from one pretty boy to another, Ranma just stared for a second before looking over at Jenny for an explanation. However, she shrugged her shoulders in ignorance. "I think that they have sort of blanked out the fact that you change forms."

"I'm sorry what?" Hibiki said, having moved to take Ranma's hand and bend over it in turn, only to pause, frowning at Jenny's odd comment.

"I'm Ranma," Ranma said, pulling her hand back quickly, the man who turns into a woman with the application of cold water? I tossed you around like a ragdoll for flirting with

me when I stopped by Blue Pegasus to talk to Jenny? Was part of the mission against the 'Sacked Seis'? Does any of this ring a bell?" Ranma asked.

"Oh, ohhhhh...." the blonde man muttered, backing away. "Right, forget I said anything." Ren too backed off before both of them turned towards Jenny, showing the mental fortitude of the truly perverted. "Um, so, there is a very odd rumor going around the guild Jenny, that you are thinking about changing guilds. Master Bob also said you were involved in that issue with Fairy Tail disappearing recently only to pop back from wherever they had gone?"

"Hmmpf, of course Jenny wouldn't change guilds, I keep saying that's impossible. After all, which other Guild is as pretty and profitable as we are? Even with her recent troubles, Jenny would never be able to showcase her abilities anywhere else as much as with us. Not that I care or anything," Ren muttered in his typical tsundere fashion, causing a shiver of disgust to go down Ranma's spine.

Jenny shook her head, her face having almost shifted into a scowl at Ren's word before she caught herself. "If money was all I was interested in, I wouldn't have to work another day in my life. I've got more than enough saved up to live on at this point and I've even begun to invest half of it. But I care more about my skills as a mage than anything else, and showcasing my 'abilities' like that, rather than just as a hostess or anything else."

She turned to show her bare shoulder, where her new Fairy Tail guild mark shown prominently in light blue. "So sorry guys, but yes, the rumors of my changing guilds are true," she chirped, her eyes glittering with something between anger and annoyance at the two Trimens.

"B, but why?" Hibiki asked, leaning forward his voice falling into a low whisper as he pushed past his normal shallow character for a second.

While the others didn't realize it, the mission against the Oración Seis had been supposed to be a sort of closure for Hibiki. He had been engaged to another mage of Blue Pegasus, the Celestial Key mage Karen Lilica. But while he didn't know it at the time, due to how she had treated her Spirits, Karen hadn't had access to them when she took a mission that brought her into conflict with Angel. She had died then, and Hibiki had hoped the mission in Seven would let him get his revenge.

Instead, it had shown him how weak he really was in straight up combat. How weak his entire guild was. It had fallen to others to avenge his lost love. Only Ichiya and Jenny had really put up much of a fight, and Ichiya had paid for it with his life. Jenny's life too had hung in the balance. That was why he had gotten behind the idea of no longer taking combat related missions. And now he just could not understand why Jenny was willing to put her life on the line again. "I, that mission in Seven... it showed me, it showed everyone involved that we don't have what it takes to be combat mages. Why are you willing to..."

“Damn she just told you dude,” Ranma interjected, making her voice deliberately even coarser than it normally was to offset her current female form. “She wants to get better as a mage. She wants to use her powers to help people, not just to give boys trouser issues and girls heart attacks out of sheer jealousy.”

While Jenny was flushing a bit and wondering if Ranma had somehow perfected the backhanded compliment technique, Hibiki frowned, looking at the short redhead for a second before shaking his head violently. “I can’t take you seriously when you’re in that form really. All of my instincts are telling me to flirt with you, yet the reality of my mind is telling me something else and that makes it impossible to actually take in your words,” he said, almost apologetically.

“Perhaps ya should go somewhere else and work that out then,” Ranma said looking a little worried. “Because if you hit on me, despite knowing about my curse, I will not be held accountable for my actions.”

“What’s the matter,” Jenny teased, reaching across to slap Ranma on the hand. “Can’t handle the heat if it’s coming from the other side of the... kitchen?”

Ranma blinked, trying to work that one out in his mind, then shook her head. “Nope, that doesn’t work at all.”

“Yeah, I knew it as soon as I said it,” Jenny frowned before trying again. “Won’t swing at the ball if the pitcher’s playing for your own team?”

“That worked better, but it’s still a little too convoluted. The other team is a tried and tested image for that kind of thing, you’re just trying too hard to put your own spin on it,” Ranma said with all the air of a connoisseur. “Still to go with your analogy, no, I’d have no problem hitting the ball.” The redhead waited a tick before smirking wickedly. “I’d just hit it right back into his balls.”

“Ouch,” muttered Ren surreptitiously crossing his legs. “Are you sure you’re not a girl?”

“I am a guy, and I know precisely how painful that would be. That’s why I mentioned it,” she said reaching out and patting him on the cheek.

Ren flinched away from his touch, while Hibiki once more decided to ignore Ranma to concentrate on Jenny. “You know, I never thought you would be the kind of woman who would change yourself for a man.”

Jenny was about to quip something along the lines of not having done so, that she had instead changed herself for a woman and a man combined. But, the scowl on Hibiki’s face surprised her somewhat, so she replied seriously. “Do you honestly think I have?”

“Haven’t you? Before you met this person,” he said gesturing to the redhead, “you cared far more about your career as a model than as a mage. It was your modeling career that made you famous.”

“That’s really stupid and shallow,” Ranma said bluntly, before Jenny waved her to silence.

“...Very well, I’ll admit that maybe I have taken my training as a mage more seriously thanks to Ranma. But that’s a choice on my part. He’s not trying to coerce me, he’s not **trying** to change me to fit some image he wants. No, perhaps you should’ve asked a better question,” Jenny smirked, showing a bit of teeth as she leaned forward towards Hibiki aggressively, setting aside all her normal poised self-control for a look that was far more aggressive than normal for her. “If my self-worth was entirely tied to my modeling career, looks and popularity, would that have been at all a good thing? If my sense of self was so shallow that only my good looks and how I appeal to the masses, mattered to me, what would that say about me as an individual?”

Hibiki leaned back as if struck and Ren scowled. “So, what are you saying?”

“I’m saying that your both incredibly shallow, stupid and ugly,” Ranma interjected. If the two men had looked affronted before, now they looked positively furious, and Ranma pointed at them, while Jenny began to laugh into one hand shaking her head. “You see, your reacting more about my calling you ugly than calling you shallow, what does that say about you?”

The two men scowled, and Ren began to summon up his magic in his hand. “Them’s fightin’ words.”

Jenny blinked at him, then looked at Hibiki, then back to Ranma and shook her head. “Are you seriously going to challenge Ranma right now? I don’t think even the entire Guild including Master Bob could handle him in a fight.”

Reminded again that the tomboyish redhead in front of them was an S-class mage, The two boys decided to act on the better part of valor, and retreated to their own table and their own dates, who thankfully for them had heard the angry tone if not the words being used when they addressed the two pretty women sitting together at another table. That could’ve gone poorly for them. That, and they both also recognized Jenny. Or at least Ranma figured they had given the hate-filled glare they were sending her way right now.

I guess being a top model isn’t all sweetness and men falling at your feet. Aloud he said, “Well that was fun.”

Jenny just giggled, shaking her head at how the two Trimens had acted.

They fell silent as the waiter returned with their menus, quickly ordering. Soon the maître d' came by with a bottle of wine, Ren having retrieved his bottle as they retreated. Ranma waved him off, and Jenny chuckled ruefully. I think going out with Ranma is going to do wonders for my own alcohol intake. Jenny wasn't really that heavy a drinker or despite the fact that she could hold her own doing so, but she was very much a social drinker. But Ranma didn't drink, unless you literally bought and poured him a glass.

At that point Jenny reached across, taking Ranma's hands in her own. "You know, while Hibiki was being annoying because he doesn't like seeing any pretty girl leave the guild, there is something he said that was kind of right. I'm not saying that I'm changing myself for you Ranma, but I have been changed by meeting you. Back on Buckler I was close to giving up on moving to Fiore. I wanted to become a true dangerous, combat type mage, you know the kind who can actually be useful. But for a while before I met you, I just couldn't figure out a way to make my magic worth much in a fight. I was starting to believe that the only thing I'd ever have going for me would be my looks. And then, in a single conversation you just blew apart my expectations of myself and what I could do with a few chosen questions and suggestions. If you haven't done that, I would be a lot weaker of a mage now than I am. I owe you Ranma, I owe you a lot."

Ranma shrugged looking uncomfortable. "I didn't do anything."

"Yes, you did," Jenny retorted.

Ranma though shook her head. "No, I didn't. I just gave you suggestions, you're the one who ran with them. You're the one who put in the work, who did the meditations, who created the pathways I guess you could say to those takeover forms you use," she chuckled, looking away then back, catching Jenny's eyes with her own even as her lips quirked in a smile. "To keep using analogies, I gave you the flint, you found the tinder, the oil, and the fire all your own."

Jenny looked at Ranma seriously, then laughed patting Ranma's hand. "You are so getting a kiss for that!"

Ranma looked surprised and she laughed. "Do you understand how rare it is for a man to not take advantage of someone especially a woman who looks like me saying that? I mean you literally could have asked me for anything just then, and not only don't you ask me for anything, you simply say that I was the one who did all the work? That's something special Ranma."

"It shouldn't be," Ranma said seriously.

"No it shouldn't, but that doesn't change what is. Wishes in one hand, do-do in the other, see which hand fills up first."

“I’m sorry do-do?” Ranma quipped and Jenny laughed again.

Their conversation went on from there as the food was served and soon Ranma agreed that it was indeed the best seafood he’d had in a long time. Eventually they were nearly finished eating, and Ranma started looking over the dancers, smirking slightly. The music was slow and stately for the most part, like waltz or something similar, though every third song seemed to pick up speed,

“What?” Jenny asked, idly looking up from where she was contemplating the last bit of her meal.

Ranma shrugged. “I don’t think I’ve told you about this style I learned once called martial arts ballroom dancing.”

“What?” Jenny questioned, one eyebrow rising in surprise.

“Oh yeah, it was the weirdest thing... one of the weird...,” she paused again. “Um, well it was a weird martial arts style. I don’t think I could even put it in my top ten come to think of it, but it’s basically dancing and martial arts merged into one, and it can be any kind of style of dancing you want.”

“That’s hilarious,” Jenny said even though she looked somewhat disbelieving. “A style based entirely off of dancing?”

“Not just dancing, I mean there are lots of styles based off dancing, moving your body to a rhythm. Attacking your enemies on a beat, that kind of thing is easy to make a martial arts style out of. But ballroom dancing? Slow songs, merging martial arts into dances like the waltz, foxtrot and so forth so you don’t break the rhythm of the dance even when you connect with your hit? That’s a little tougher,” Ranma opined. He (Ranma had been in his male body during the entire adventure, a rarity) had learned it when he had been roped into helping out Kodachi again against the Red Rose of Fujiwara High, one of her two archrivals.

“Although I actually liked the Red Rose way better than the White, this other gal Kodachi had a rivalry with. At least the Red Rose liked to fight her enemies face to face rather than through underhanded poisons and such. The White Rose was just Kodachi with a worse bod, better hair and a white color scheme. Dancing against the Red Rose and her party was very weird ‘cause I had to keep Kodachi from getting us disqualified half the time, but it was kind of fun too.”

When Ranma finished her story, she looked across at Jenny and chuckled, “Ya don’t believe me do ya?”

Jenny laughed, standing up and holding out a hand to him as she moved around the table. “Nope, but tell you what, for coming up with that on the fly I’ll let you lead.”

Ranma grinned, hopping to her feet. "Good, 'cause I never learned how to follow."

"That was so profound," Jenny teased, letting Ranma now pull her off out onto the dance floor. They hugged at the edge of it before Ranma was sweeping the blonde out onto the dance floor.

The two ladies gathered a lot of looks, since it was unusual for two women to be that open about being in a relationship. And this was Jenny Realight, she was practically a celebrity, even if there were a lot of people who were saying that the scar on her face ruined their image of her.

If any of those people were there at this point in time, they would've gotten the shock of their lives, as Ranma and Jenny danced away for several slow songs. Ranma stayed in the lead as they moved through the tango, then the waltz, and then the Charleston.

Jenny was laughing as they came out of the last song shaking her head ruefully and biting her lip as she looked at the redhead. *Oooh boy, dancing never ceases to get my engine going.* "Why am I not surprised that you can dance so well?"

"It is just body control after all," Ranma intoned with a self-deprecating shrug. "Now if we had to perform on a slick surface or something, that'd be more difficult."

"As if a barbarian who likes to dress up as a boy could ever dance as well as we could," Ren's date said, moving through the dancers towards them, the tanned host holding her arm.

Jenny's eyes narrowed as she finally recognized the girl. Her name was Macy, an up and coming model who actually was part of the mercenary guild Southern Wolves. Like many others in the industry, she had been out-shown by Jenny and Mira. In Jenny's opinion she was a true 'rhymes with witch,' but she had also occasionally seemed honestly interested in a relationship with Ren rather than just his body.

Hibiki moved up as well, another female mage and part time model on his arm. This mage Jenny recognized as Sara. She was another Blue Pegasus hostess but she had more often been called on to act as a spy in upper class circles for paying clients. She was also the guild's dance instructor and was easily the best dancer in the guild, well above Jenny's own skills. She sneered at Jenny and Ranma, although her eyes were warier than either of the two men, having noticed how well Ranma and Jenny moved not only as dancers but as partners. Still, she spoke up too. "Agreed, I don't think either of them can **really** dance."

"I cannot allow you to take away one of the flowers of our Guild without a fight Ranma," Hibiki said seriously staring at the Water Dragon slayer. "But neither can I argue that you would destroy me in any kind of straight fight. But I demand satisfaction in some way, so I challenge you. I overheard you saying earlier that you knew how to dance, well put your money where your mouth is. Let's have a dance off, and see who wins."

Now, while Ranma originally came from a world where a dance off was something you had in front of a computer screen that rated your moves, he was not going to back down from a challenge. One world or another, that hadn't changed. "Let's do this."

The three couples moved to one end of the dance floor, and then, when the next song began, moved across the dance floor through and around the other couples. At first Jenny thought they were just doing a regular dance off, dancing until one couple or the other became too tired to continue or didn't perform the dance, a Rumba at the moment. Ranma on the other hand was more used to sudden challenges like this, and was watching their surroundings closely. When Hibiki and Sara moved around one of the other couples on the dance floor, Ranma was ready.

Without warning, Ranma lifted Jenny off her feet for a second, carrying her over what looked like well disguised sweep kicks from one of the two girls. 'Sara,' she thought, although she only got a glimpse of the girl before she disappeared into the rest of the dancing crowd. "What the..."

Ranma grunted, and then shifted backwards into Jenny's side, her arms going around Jenny's midriff. Then the shorter redhead flipped Jenny around one arm. There were some cheers, and Jenny blinked as she hadn't realized that Hibiki's foot had just passed through where she'd been standing. A secondary blow to Ranma's side came in from Ren, and he turned swiftly, bringing her up over his knee, causing Jenny to block a follow-on kick from Macy even as Ren moved away once again twisting around through the crowd.

But Jenny was an S-class mage, and she adapted quickly. "Okay, so this is some kind of combat right? Should have known that bitch Sara would think of something like this," Jenny muttered, even as she slowly slipped into battle mode herself, looking around at the crowd of other dancers, as they began to move into the more formal dances at once more.

"Pretty much. And yeah, I think Sara's the one that's calling the tune here," Ranma said definitively.

She was the dance instructor for the Guild, and also a bit of an industrial and social spy specialist," Jenny replied with a nod, sharing what she knew of her former guildmate. "So, where do we go from here?"

"Well, this is a perfect time for me to show that I was telling the truth about learning how to use martial arts ballroom dancing," Ranma quipped with a rakish smirk.

Jenny nodded, an answering smirk of her own face. "I suppose it is. What do you want me to do?"

"Since I'm the lead, that means that I am the pivot point. I keep my feet on the ground unfortunately, and you get to do most of the attacking as I put you in position to do so."

“Sounds like fun,” Jenny said with a laugh, before leaning down and kissing the redhead. She then moved her lips up to Ranma’s ear and whispered, “Tell me what to do.”

Ranma pulled back and winked at her as they too began to move into the formal dance stance. She put one arm around Jenny’s waist, their other hands twining together as they moved, the hand thrust out to the side as they walked in that direction in the classic tango position.

A second later, they were boxed in by the other two couples. As they did, the two women were flung out by their joined hands in a move from the dance, except for the fact that their legs flashed towards where Jenny was supposed to be if she did the same move.

Instead, while Ranma did release Jenny, she thrust the blonde down, forcing Jenny to skid across the floor on her knees. Jenny twirled, came up and then pulled Ranma in, with Ranma ducking under another elbow blow from Hibiki. Then Ranma was holding Jenny from the front. At a whispered warning she leaned well back in Ranma’s arms at the waist, in what was supposed to be a dramatic spin, but she punched out at the same time, catching Sara on the side, thumping her back into Hibiki.

Ranma continued spinning, pulling Jenny with her, as they wound around the other couple, coming in again, this time Jenny’s foot catching Ren in the side. Macy however wasn’t there, having looped around Ren in turn.

“Still, not bad for a first try,” Ranma said with an evil, low-key cackle. “Let’s see if we can do this again.”

“Concentrate on Ren”, Jenny said authoritatively. “He is the weak link here. Hibiki has his pride, but Ren, he’s probably in on this because it looked fun at first, but he won’t want to take hits in public like this. And Macy is not nearly as forceful of personality as Sara.”

“Gotcha,” Ranma confirmed, already scanning the crowd.

The dance soon became a more wild, fast-paced one, but Ranma moved into it easily, pulling Jenny along with her. Again, the other two couples tried to bracket them, but this time, after a whispered instruction, Ranma flung Jenny out to the side then as their hands slowly slid out of one another Ranma flipped herself up and over her, getting behind the taller girl, and once more putting her arms around her waist. This trapped both of Jenny’s arms and across but allowed Ranma to lift her up easily which in turn let Jenny kick out like a mule into the side of Ren as he tried to turn to follow their speedy movement.

He grimaced, and slid sideways, even as Ranma and Jenny twirled away, rejoining the large crowd of dancers. The blow had been so fast that none of them had even seen it land, but Ren was certainly feeling it, and he grimaced, holding his side, pulling one hand away from a suddenly worried looking Macy.

In the next volley of attacks, elbows and heads began to come into play, with Jenny taking a few blows from Macy, but returning them to both her and Ren. To one side, Sara was able to dodge while still maintaining the general look of it being a dance, as was Hibiki, though not nearly as well.

Now both of the so-called attacking pairs were feeling it, and Ranma and Jenny were still going strong. Ranma ducked the two of them underneath a blow from Hibiki and watched as Jenny nearly kicked Ren's legs out from under him before rising into a very nice uppercut which caught the tanned pretty boy on the chin. He stumbled back even as Jenny twisted back into Ranma's arms lashing out with an elbow that caught Hibiki in the face. Then they were off, Jenny sashaying her hips for good measure, as Hibiki's eyes crossed from the impact.

Hibiki was now rethinking things. *How, when did Jenny of all people get this strong? Or was she always this strong, and I was just blinded by her model persona to see it? That... did I ever really know her at all?*

Ren was thinking much the same thing. The two men had taken more of the punishment Jenny had dealt out in this dance battle than their partners and were now ready to call it quits. Macy too knew when a battle was lost. This kind of fight hadn't ever been her forte anyway, and now she had taken a few nasty hits.

Sara seemed to sense this and scowled. "Fine," she muttered even before Hibiki could even open his mouth. "Let's give this up for now."

At the next song ended, she pulled her partner off the dance floor, admitting defeat with ill grace, while Macy did the same, looking far more sanguine about being defeated. Ranma smirked at them both, before locking eyes with Hibiki and Ren as Jenny rested the top of her head onto the top of Ranma's, smirking. "So, I suppose you concede?"

"You've won this round Jenny," Sara growled out, "but I'll win the next time."

"Er, I'm ready to face your challenge anytime you want," Jenny said, a little confused. *What crawled up her t-back and died?*

As they watched the foursome leave the restaurant ahead of them, Jenny was still wondering what the heck she'd ever done to Sara to make the dancer hate her so much when Ranma spoke up. "You just got yourself another rival you know. That whole 'I'll win next time' that's a flag if ever I heard one. Luckily she seems to be more a Gos-type than anything else."

"Yeah, I suppose I can see that, though why the heck she's got it out for me I don't know," Jenny muttered, shaking her head. "Also 'Gos-type'?"

Ranma laughed and began to explain as the two girls walked down the street. Ranma soon had Jenny nearly keeling over with laughter as he told her about the voodoo witch doctor and his bizarre schemes to defeat Ranma.

“So,” Jenny said after a few moments of regaining her breath. “Does this kind of thing happen to you often? The weird martial arts or magical challenges?”

“It used to happen all the time,” Ranma stated with a nod. “These days my challenges seem to be more about life and death than anything else. Huh, never thought I’d look back on my time in Nerima as dull...weird.”

Jenny laughed. “Awesome.” Ranma blinked in surprise and she shrugged. “At least I know it will never be boring when I’m around you.”

“...No,” Ranma replied dryly, “the phrase boring and I have never been introduced.”

Jenny laughed, and the two continued their walk together, still arm in arm.

OOOOOOO

Most people, if they thought about it at all, believed that the title Wizard Saint was given to the ten strongest wizards in all of Ishgar. Despite that, only the top four were among the very strongest combat mages in the peninsula. The others were chosen because their magic was either unique, or because of other reasons, and there was just as many reasons why someone wouldn’t be chosen despite their magical strength. For all his strength, Jellal had been given the title more, because he was a member of the Magic Council of Fiore than any other reason. Gildarts, for all that his power would rank in the top five Wizard Saints at the least, was not on that list because of his personality.

Erza Scarlet and Laxus Dreyar had both been under consideration to replace the defunct Wizard Saint, but their youth and the fact Makarov was one had worked against their inclusion. Thus, the tenth spot remained vacant at present.

And yet, the top four were undoubtedly the strongest mages in all of Ishgar. Unfortunately, since it was only their power that won them the title, allowances had to be made for their personalities.

The King’s Council had requested help to be sent into Minstrel and two of the three strongest had instantly responded, as the Kings had all known they would. Draculos and Wolfheim were extremely good about that kind of thing, respecting authority, the rule of law,

and of course the Kings themselves. Iron Rock Jura volunteering when asked was also well within the realm of possibility. His was perhaps the most down to earth and helpful personality among the Ten Wizard Saints.

Two more declined. Terence the Healing Saint was stuck in Caelum at the moment, seeing to some kind of wasting disease that had sprung up there. He had promised to head to Minstrel as soon as her work was done, but that was all. Still, he wouldn't have been much use in fighting, not because his magic couldn't allow him to do so, but because Terence was a staunch noncombatant, who refused to fight save in extreme cases of self-defense or defense of another, and even then, he would not kill.

Bartosz the Iron Mage flatly refused. He was the only Wizard Saint who was married, and his wife was expecting at present, so he refused to leave her side. Several of the others of course simply refused, with none of them really giving a reason for it.

A few, like Makarov, weren't even asked. They had other duties, like Warrod, who was in Desierto stopping the desert from moving north as was usual. The other two weren't anywhere they could receive messages.

However, of those asked, there was one acceptance that startled everyone involved.

God Serena, the strongest mage in Fiore and number one Wizard Saint, read the request handed to him by a messenger frog in his villa deep in the heart of Fiore frowning as he did so. He was a man of medium height and build along the same lines as Ranma or Natsu with medium-length spiky orange hair which oddly enough resembled rabbit ears where stretched out from the top of his head. His thick eyebrows were scrunched up right now, the act also pulling on a long scar over the bridge of his nose running from side to side.

He is dressed at present in a pair of swim trunks in white and blue, but a more formal robe of the same color lay nearby. When he had been handed the message, he had been lounging in his backyard, soaking in the sun from a magical tanning device.

The messenger had been expecting to be tossed out on his ear for interrupting the mage's downtime. Serena would never go beyond that, but he also wasn't above smacking around messengers, or indeed anyone beyond the kings, if he wanted to.

Instead however the blond man rose to his feet, shouting in his normal bombastic manner, "How interesting! A full-scale war, a holy war no less. Magnificent, it will be quite the stage to show off my magic. Still, meeting up with Draculos and the others? Bah, as if with me involved, they will have anything to do.

The messenger to him, an extremely senior messenger frog of Fiore, had dealt with God Serena before. Thus he bowed his head and replied obsequiously, "Of course not God Serena! But we didn't know you would agree, and, forgive me for saying, but they can be useful while

you are battling the main threats, can't they? They can evacuate civilian, and make sure no one on the other side escapes of course."

"Hmmpf, I suppose so, at that. And if I look at it the right way, meeting this Jura fellow could be interesting. He's the only Wizard Saint I haven't met yet. Very well, where do I meet them?"

So it was that Jura found himself meeting the top three Wizard Saints, God Serena, Draculos, and Wolfheim all in one go. The four of them met at Era, where they would be taking the flying vessel Christina to Minstrel. Blue Pegasus had leased it to the Magic Council after the vote for no longer taking combat missions.

Before this, Master Bob had flatly refused to it hand over. Outside their work in hosting, and generally being pretty, the flying ship was actually the only thing that Blue Pegasus really could hang its hat on. It allowed them to dispatch mages far faster than any other Guild, into and out of Fiore. Indeed, his mages had taken jobs that took them into Caelum, Bosco and Seven more than any other Fiore guild thanks to that ability. But now that they were no longer going to take combat missions, it wasn't necessary, and Master Bob had decided to send it on to the Magic Council to see if they could copy the ancient enchantments on it.

As Jura arrived at the meeting point, God Serena was saying, "Why do I not just simply fly us all there! It would surely take us a shorter amount of time. Then this old clunker he said, gesturing to the large flying vessel.

"Because that would exhaust even you God Serena," one of the others said with a wary look at the more powerful, if younger seeming man. "Flying myself would exhaust me as well, so much I would be forced to...partake the instant we reached Minstrel. Besides which, this way we can be briefed on the mission as we go, and I for one believe that information will help us do our job better."

The speaker was named Draculos Hyberion, and he was the second strongest Wizard saint. In appearance he did not stand out nearly as much as God Serena in his normal outfit of a white robe-like shirt with blue long sleeves, blue belt and full-sized blue pants, red shoulders and large, wide collar. Although the fake dharma wheel on his back, comprised of twelve wide blades of some kind, was easily his most outstanding, and bizarre, feature.

In contrast, Draculos looked almost plain beyond a red tattoo to one side of his forehead composed of multiple red marks made to be in a shape like a cross. He was a middle-aged man with dark purple hair cut in a severe sort of style with red eyes, and a short, trimmed mustache. He had strangely pointy ears, and wore a dress shirt under a black tie, complete with bow tie, and matched with black pants, a lightly decorated vest, dark-colored slacks, and a black bow tie. The only flash of other color came in the form of a ring he wore on one hand.

Looking at him, it took Jura only a few seconds to realize this was Draculos, the second-strongest of the Wizard Saints.

God Serena huffed but didn't argue. Judging by the sneer on his face, Jura thought it looked as if God Serena felt it was beneath him frankly. Or, Jura thought he was distracted by the attendants sent with the Christina by Blue Pegasus. After all, they hadn't given the ship to the Magic Council, they had rented its use out to them.

Four ladies of extreme beauty had walked down the ramp from the ship, smiling cheerfully at them all. "Wizard Saints sirs, my name is Rachel, I am one of Blue Pegasus chief aeronauts. We have two men from the King's Council already inside who are apparently going to be filling you in on your mission, and we have taken aboard enough food for the trip. If you could all please board?"

"Now that's what I like to see! If I can't travel under my own power, then at least, I can travel in style as befitting my strength!" God Serena shouted, moving forward and putting an arm around two of the ladies and walking up the ramp with them smiling and laughing.

The three others looked at one another, and Jura bowed his head. I do not believe we have been formally made known. "Jura Neekis of Lamia Scale, at your service."

"We have heard much of you, said the third man, nodding his head approvingly. He was another middle-aged man, although his years showed more in the form of wrinkles than it did on Draculos. He was also short, putting Jura in mind almost of Master Makarov or his own Master Babasaama. He had a long green beard and wore a light vest with large buttons and stripes. His dark slacks were also decorated, but with diamonds shapes, and he wore a blue hat that looked larger than his head and, strangely, glasses and a single earring.

Despite not being prepared for his being so short in person, Jura knew he was Wolfheim, the third Wizard Saint. "A serious sort, who takes his position as a Wizard Saint seriously, and always does his best. If only more mages were like that these days."

"I like to think so, although I have recently been humbled most severely," Jura said, shaking his head as he remembered the mission against Brain and his followers that had gone so wrong so quickly.

"Poison is a dangerous thing the best of times. When you're least expecting it, it can strike down even the best of us," Draculos stated. It couldn't strike him or Wolfheim of course. Their magics made them practically immune to that kind of thing, but at the moment, Draculos was fondly thinking about poisoning God Serena, so he could be excused for thinking fondly about that method of attack.

Jura nodded, grateful for their largess, even if he didn't think of it that way himself. "Shall we get aboard?"

Several hours later, after the two messengers had given them all the information they had on the war between Minstrel and Midi, Draculos frowned leaning forward. "So, we have this war that has suddenly broken out, and possibly the Dark Guild Tartarus which may or may not be behind it." He held up a hand as one of the men went to speak sipping at his goblet, a silver chalice that looked even more expensive than the rest of his outfit, for a second before replying. "I know that you and the King's Council and indeed the Magic Council's of Seven, Fiore, and Minstrel, such as it is, all believe they could be but you do not have evidence."

God Serena laughed harshly. "Why do we care about evidence? Let's just crush everyone in front of us. That'll either force these Tartarus fools to realize where they stand on the food chain, and force them into the dark again or, they might feel courageous enough to step out into the open and let me crush them all in one go."

"Actually, you have a point Serena," Wolfheim said, speaking up before Draculos could reply, which was somewhat odd for the two of them. The two of them worked closely together all the time, so much so that it was very rare to see one or the other on a mission without their partner.

"Of course I do! I'm the star, after all."

"Once we get involved, if Tartarus is behind, as God Serena says they'll do one of two things, double down or escape," Wolfheim said, looking over at his partner and trying to ignore the mad laughter from Serena or the giggles coming from the hostesses on either side of him. "But in either case, they have to be around somewhere don't they? If I was causing something like this, I'd want to observe it firsthand, rather than through the eyes of my tools or spies. And we know they have a floating fortress too thanks to Toma's reports. Just like Grimoire Heart, they are able to move around Ishgar with an almost frightening ease."

And now, with Draculos and God Serena, they're not the only ones that can fly not even for long stretches of time," Jura mused.

You propose that you three will handle the war on the ground, while I search out this Tartarus cube and it's owners?" Serena nodded. "That makes sense. However, for all of this to happen, we have to get there fast."

With that, he stood up, and moved to the door opening it. The wind outside plucked at their clothing, and the hostesses all screamed and scrambled back, pulling themselves way from the door and the draft attempting to pluck them out and send them into freefall beyond. Laughing, Serena hopped out, climbing up onto the top of Christina, before laughing and gesturing upwards. "Gale Dragon's Wind Wave!" he bellowed, making up the name right then and there. A second later a heavy wave of air slammed into the ship, from behind speeding it along even faster than its engines could go.

Draculos leaned back, briefly closing his eyes as he gathered his self-control. While Wolfheim was always put out by people acting without dignity or by people making jokes in his presence he didn't understand, Draculos found dealing with Serena trying beyond all belief. *Yet it is undeniable that for all the size of his ego, it is proportionate to his power. He will be a massive help on this mission. Curse it.*

OOOOOO

Two days after they had left, Jenny and Ranma arrived back in Magnolia. Entering the town proper, Jenny left Ranma with a kiss on the cheek before heading off to find Erza. She had a few questions to ask the redhead. For his part, Ranma went out to find Wendy. He trumped through the new-fallen snow toward the guild, only to be told Wendy wasn't there. She was instead with the Strausses at their large house a few blocks away, learning how to bake. Baking was an area Ranma didn't do so well in outside of cookies, and Wendy loved things like that.

Knocking on the door to their house, Ranma heard Mira shout from within, "Come in!" Inside, Ranma found not only Wendy, but Mira, Laxus, Natsu and Gajeel. "Ranma-nii!" Wendy shouted, hopping to her feet and rushing over to him.

The smell of just made cupcakes and other things filled the air, and Ranma locked eyes with Laxus, one eyebrow rising, even as he leaned down to pull Wendy up into a hug. The three Exceed were also there, sitting around the table drinking tea of all things, with Panther Lily sitting in his exceed body beside Gajeel. The two of them had somehow bonded over their fight in Edolas and had begun to hang out as much as Happy and Natsu did, although with their own dynamic.

Carla was of course in her human form, as she always was whenever she could be. *Seems almost cheating that she can enlarge her magical reserves passively practicing something she loves so much like that.* And while Happy didn't look all that happy about that, he seemed to have moved past it and was engaging Panther Lily in some kind of conversation as Carla talked with Mira.

In response to Ranma Laxus huffed and looked away, his eyes tracing up and down Mira's form for a moment before looking back at Ranma.

Ranma nodded, understanding what the man was saying without words. Yes, there was a decent enough reason right there to be engaged in something so girly as baking.

"Hey sister, what have you been up to?" he asked, winking down at Wendy.

“Not much,” she chirped. “Fighting Natsu and Gajeel since they followed me to my training with Porlyusica-san,” she said pouting over at the two. “But Gajeel promised to buy me something, and Natsu promised to at least leave me alone once you got back. So, I’ll take what I can get from him,” she recounted wearily shaking her head. “Honestly, which of us is supposed to be the older one? You’d think I had taken away his favorite toy when I said I wouldn’t interrupt my training with Porlyusica-san.”

Natsu shouted, “Hey!” while everyone else in the room laughed as Wendy went on unhurriedly. “Then she chased them both away with a broom. It broke over Gajeel’s head though and she had to stop and get another one.”

“You need to learn when no means no Natsu,” Ranma said with a slow shake of his head. “And I hope this sparring with Wendy didn’t take away from your doing the exercises I told you and Gajeel to do before?” he said dangerously. “If it has, I’m going to have to figure out an appropriate punishment. And it won’t be fighting or more training since I know that would just defeat the purpose,” he added.

This caused Natsu’s eager face to falter, while Gajeel huffed and muttered under his breath, “I kept up with mine.”

“Traitor!” Natsu scowled at him.

Shaking his head at their antics, Ranma sat down, with Wendy in his lab, nuzzling into his shoulder. Just because she had decided on her own to stay back this time didn’t mean that she liked not having him around. After all, they’d been together for most of her life by this point, and that wasn’t something she was willing to walk away from.

“So how did your and Jenny’s trip go?” Mira asked. “Did anything interesting happen or was it all straightforward?”

“Hah, when has anything I’ve been involved in been straightforward?” Ranma chuckled, shaking his head. “It was fun. Jenny’s a good conversationalist, and we figured out quite a few exercises she could do to both enlarge her magical core and add a few more Takeover Mecha Souls to her repertoire, which was already pretty vast.”

Mira nodded. She knew Jenny had at least twenty, possibly more Mecha Souls that she could call upon although only about ten were strong enough to be used in combat. But those ten allowed her to face Mira on an equal footing. What she didn’t have was Mira’s sheer brute power or endurance. All of her high-end combat souls also took out a lot of magical energy to use, so Mira could just outlast her if she couldn’t beat her in a straight up fight. “Anything else?”

“Well she showed me her apartment, and Carla, if you were serious about wanting to renovate the apartment, work with Jenny, she is really good at it, I only request nothing too

girly in the main sitting room. Oh, and we did get into a kind of dance competition and martial arts match..." Ranma began.

He spent a nice two hours with the others before leaving Wendy there to finish her impromptu tea party/cooking session, the other boys leaving with him. Natsu and Gajeel were going off to spar for a time, while Laxus headed home to meditate. Whereas Ranma had been gone, he had unlocked his Second Origin but that in turn had shot his magical control straight to hell, and he wanted to regain that magical control before challenging Ranma to a fight. Ranma could sense he was stronger though, by at least half again, which was damn impressive.

With nothing better to do, Ranma had decided to go over to check in on Erza and Jenny, when he was hailed by a voice shouting "Ranma!"

Ranma turned to find Gray, clothed for once, in a T-shirt and shorts, tromping through the snow towards him. *Not that I can talk really*, Ranma thought. He was still wearing the silk pants and light silk shirt that he had been wearing when he and Jenny had left two days back despite the temperature plummeting another ten degrees over those days.

"Hey Gray," Ranma called out nodding his head to the other mage, having an idea of what this would be about. "Something on your mind?"

"Seilah," Gray said flatly. "We didn't talk about it in the other dimension, because it wasn't the time, but I did see her there more than once. One of the demons who attacked us, one of the demons who killed Ichiya, that Quattro Cerberus mage, and Sherry, who destroyed a town, and took my hand." He looked at Ranma sternly. "One of those demon bitches was following you and young Wendy around like, like a puppy!"

Ranma flushed looking away at the image his traitorous mind had just created before turning back to Gray, trying to keep any hint of that out of his mind. "I wouldn't put it like that, but, well did you notice during the fight that she was reluctant to fight?"

"I did. And that, and the fact that Erza seems to know about her, was the only reason why I didn't explode at the time. But you owe me a fucking explanation!" Gray growled, holding up his mechanical arm and thumping a fist into Ranma's chest.

Ranma sighed, then gestured up to the rooftop. "Let's talk up there, away from prying eyes."

Gray nodded, and surprisingly was able to hop up after Ranma, kicking off one wall then on to the other, and then up before he clambered onto the roof. Even with the final bit of climbing it was a decent show of athleticism. Catching Ranma's look of surprise, Gray snorted shaking his head. "What, you think that the flame brain's the only one that's been training? I get a shit ton of training done during the winter normally. But with you pushing him, well let's just say that I had to figure out some new workout regimens of my own."

Feeling a little guilty, Ranma asked "Do you want some help with that?"

"If you wouldn't mind sparring with me say every Saturday or so, that'd be great the ice mage replied with a smirk. "But beyond that, no, I'm good with myself."

Ranma nodded approvingly, appreciating the younger man's attitude. He then squatted down in a meditative pose, putting his hands in his lap, unmindful of the snow crunching underneath. It had snowed at least twice since he and Jenny had left Magnolia, and there were a few inches of snow everywhere. Not enough yet to truly stop people from moving around, but enough to be pretty.

Gray knelt across from him, looking at Ranma sternly and Ranma sighed and began. "I suppose that I should state that as her words should've indicated to you during the fight, Wendy and Seilah had actually met before. I had met her too, although not along with Wendy. You remember how I ran off after we dealt with Lullaby? Seilah was why. My Demon Slayer powers weren't shutting down after I had killed Lullaby as they should have so I knew another demon was around somewhere."

"How does Demon Slayer Magic work anyway?" Gray interrupted. "I've been meaning to ask that for a while now."

"How to put it?" Ranma mused. "At first it seems seemingly benign, but it really isn't at base. "When I'm fighting a demon, it makes my reflexes go through the roof even for me, it allows me to read my opponent easily, far more than I am able to do otherwise. But I've also noticed that it made feeling emotions much harder. Or at least, emotions that aren't based on destroying my opponent. I don't like it, and I'm grateful that I was able to get a handle on using it and shutting it down, during that battle with the demons when they tried to attack us and Brain. Which brings me back to the story, cool?"

Gray nodded. The description Ranma had given him of the Demon Slayer powers was enough to quench his interest in that and he was very interested in why Ranma was palling around with Seilah.

From there Ranma told the tale about how they'd met and how he had found that Seilah seemed far less argumentative and disdainful of humans than others. How she had not wanted to fight, and how she had helped to defeat Nirvana, working with Ranma and the others to do it. How afterward, he had basically agreed to watch over her and protect Seilah in return for her providing them with as much information as they could.

Gray leaned forward interestedly at that point, his eyes lighting up. "Information on their spies? There been so many freaking rumors about shakeups in the government, in this country and Seven I think. Was that what was behind it?"

“Well that, and the fact that we were already cleaning up the Stupid Seis’s spy-rings at the same time, Ranma replied, before leaning forward. “This can’t go further, but one thing she did say, and that Hoteye, who also turned his coat during the battle, said was that a councilmember was working directly for Grimoire Heart. We found out who, and we convinced him to turn counteragent for us against them.

“Holy hell,” Gray muttered, leaning forward too. “Ranma you have to bring me along with if you’re ever sent on a mission to take them out all right? That sounds like a hell of a time, and Natsu’s already stolen several marches on me. I can’t let this chance slide.”

“You’re as much of a combat junkie as he is aren’t you,” Ranma said with amusement. “You’re just more subtle about it.”

“Dude a damned earthquake is more subtle than Natsu,” Gray said with a grin.

Ranma laughed at that then Gray leaned away, frowning a little. “Okay, so I understand why you think she’s on the side of the angels, and since she’s acted that way since I suppose that she really has turned over a new leaf. But I do want to talk to her,” he said after a few seconds of silence and contemplation. “Is that cool?”

“Cool with me,” Ranma confirmed with a shrug. “She owes you an apology, hell she still owes Jenny one.”

“And Jenny’s okay with this?” Gray asked in disbelief.

“Jenny’s fine with it,” Ranma confirmed with a nod. The two of them had talked about Seilah on the way back to Magnolia. The conversation had been decidedly frosty, but Jenny appeared to be willing to let Seilah be, so long as she wasn’t part of their multi-relationship. “She’s not exactly Seilah’s biggest fan, but yeah she’s willing to live with it.”

“Cool,” Gray said with a nod, standing up. “Let’s go talk to her now then. I want my apology dammit. And maybe a few years free food at this book café they are opening.”

Ranma laughed, flipped himself upwards and back to land on his feet, shaking off the snow thankful that it wasn’t turning into slush quickly enough to change him into his female form. Dancing with Jenny in his female form had been fun but he had no desire to once more change into his female form again soon.”

The two boys made their way through the town in somewhat companionable silence, as Ranma led the way to the café/apartment that Gildarts had bought wholesale for the trio, or rather his alter’s daughter. The fact he had done so, so easily, and without even quibbling over the price, showed exactly how much money S-class mages could earn, even with all the money he had to pay to fix the damages he occasionally caused. Despite the whole Gildarts Shift thing, Gildarts, while on missions was actually not nearly as destructive as Erza or Natsu routinely

were. It was just that when he relaxed too much, he tended to accidentally destroy things. And when he did, they were destroyed far more completely than they would in either of the other mages case.

They had reached the street the apartment/café was on, and Ranma had just said that he hadn't actually stopped in since they had bought it, when they saw Edo-Cana, who had taken the name Katerina almost the same day she came to Earth Land, charging out of the café. The apartment on the second floor was a studio apartment, and could only be reached from within the café, but it was apparently quite cozy, according to Gildarts anyway.

Ranma had never seen Katerina move in anything beyond a stately walk, so it was highly unusual. So was the fact her parasol was missing, and the fact he thought her cheeks were a tad red too. All this made him stop and ask, "Katerina, what's wrong?"

"Nothing!" she shouted, before blushing and holding a hand to her face. Her face was now even more on fire than before. "I, um, nothing! It is just, while I am perfectly happy with having a business with Seilah and with Edo-Wendy, I refuse to share an apartment with them any longer."

"Huh, they already moved in?" Ranma asked, perplexed by both the vehemence and what could possibly have elicited this kind of response. *Then again considering who it's coming from, she might have just seen one or the other in their underwear for all I know.*

"Edo-Wendy did so two days ago, the evening you and Jenny left Magnolia. And she hasn't left the apartment since," Katerina muttered, shaking a little before womanfully taking control of herself. "**Ahem*, yes, well, I apologize for my histrionics, but there are just some things a lady would rather not know about. I am going to go to see if there is a room available at Fairy Hills. If there is, I believe I will take up my father's offer to help me pay for it at least until our café is bringing in money. Have a nice day, the both of you," she bid them farewell, and with one hand on her hat and the other pulling her winter jacket closed, muttered, "perverts" under her breath again as she turned away, flouncing off down the streets.

Ranma and Gray exchanged a glance, then Ranma shrugged.

"They can't be that bad, can they? Katerina is a major prude after all," Gray said.

"Dude, coming from you, that ain't saying hell of a lot. Do you even have a sex drive?" Ranma asked, his own worries on that score derailed for a moment as they entered the shop.

"Ouch," Gray muttered, shaking his head. "And yeah, I've got one, I just prefer not to be around a girl who could suddenly take it into her head to kick my ass. Call it the growing up with Erza and Mira syndrome."

"So, someone like Lisa or Anna?" Ranma asked with a grin. "Were you really..."

“No, I wasn’t, although I might have been,” Gray said, a little shiftily, his eyes looking anywhere but at Ranma’s grinning face. “But they were always so tied up with Natsu, I knew I’d never have a chance there.”

“Fair enough,” Ranma shrugged. “So, no ladies who have, shall we say trouble expressing their emotions, and no S-class mages?”

“Exactly. Call me picky if you like, but I’d rather not be fighting with a woman to see who is wearing the pants in the relationship,” Gray replied.

Ranma laughed at that, then asked, “And exactly how many girls does that leave in the Guild?”

“Two,” Gray said with a scowl. “Both of whom are more trouble than they are worth in other ways. Hence why I don’t flirt, or show interest in anyone in the Guild.”

As Ranma moved toward the back of the café, Ranma took a moment to look around, finding the interior cluttered, but mostly clean save for sawdust, the smell of new-cut wood permeating his nose to the extent it was making him want to sneeze. Still, for all that it was unfinished, Ranma could see the shape of what the trio of ladies wanted to create here.

The open kitchen at the far end, a bar separating that area from the rest of the café, with a few dozen appliances in the process of being set up. There were marks on the walls indicating where construction workers were going to be knocking out more windows, four to a wall, as well as bookshelves in between the windows. There was also a central area, a pillar cut into an octagon in the center, with each side dominated by bookshelf. The café’s seating areas were arranged around it, and in each corner were more seating areas, with softer chairs and lower tables.

To one side of the kitchen area was a slim staircase, so slim Gildarts had had to walk up the stairs sideways, but it led up to the second floor, leading directly into the doorway there. Ranma followed Gray up it until the smell of fresh-cut wood below faded between one step and the next. Then another scent started to make itself known to his senses, one strangely familiar, yet just different enough he and so slight the Water Dragon Slayer had to strain to pick it up at all.

Ahead of him Gray opened the door, and was about to call out, when he gaped, his eyes going wide as a blush suffused his own features.

Within the apartment was several large beanbags, a pair of sofa beds, and a table. There didn’t seem to be much else up here just yet. However that wasn’t what grabbed Gray’s attention, nor behind him, Ranma’s. No that dubious honor was given over to the fact that Edo-Wendy was sitting on one of those sofas, naked save for a bra that was trying desperately to hold in her chest, while below, Seilah’s head had popped up from between her thighs when

the door opened. Moreover, it was very, very obvious the demon girl was also almost naked, her skirt gone, her blouse open and no bra in sight underneath.

Glaring at the youth, Seilah intoned, "Macro: You will turn around shut the door, and..." she paused as she spotted, Ranma poked his head over Gray's shoulder and began to blush. Before continuing and forget everything you saw, Gray. Ranma... you may come in if you wish."

Ranma instead grabbed Gray's shoulder, dragging him out of the door and closed it firmly behind him. "We'll wait until you two are decent, but Seilah, Gray's here to hear something from you, and you better make it good."

The touch and the drag seemed to break Gray out of the hold of the demon woman's magic and he stumbled into the wall of the stairwell, his face on fire. "Rah...gah..."

"So, Katerina wasn't just overreacting huh," Ranma muttered, shaking his head and fighting down his own blush. *That was damned quick. Not, what five days after I rejected her, and she's jumping in bed with Wendy 2.0? What's up with that?* Deciding to put this down to what he'd heard called the 'rebound syndrome,' Ranma decided it was no longer any business of his. He waited in the dark of the staircase, as shuffling and annoyed muttering was heard within.

Soon Edo-Wendy, open the door, gesturing both boys in, a glare on her face. "If you're going to reject me, the least you can do is at least let me get some from someone else," she said glaring angrily at Ranma. "Do you have any idea the kind of dry spell I've been going through lately?"

Ranma held up his hands, backing away rapidly, while his face started to light up again. "I don't have a problem with it, and I didn't mean to interrupt you. But that door of yours kept in any sound or anything that could have hinted what was going on. And I didn't know Gray was just going to open the door without knocking like that either."

"Gray's lack of common manners aside, there is a spell on the door that blocks noise coming in or out. Another spell on the stairwell keeps away smells. That way people can sleep up here even when cooking is occurring downstairs," Seilah intoned, cocking her head thoughtfully as she looked at Ranma's blush, then looked back at her Wendy. "Was I incorrect in offering to let him join us do you think?"

"Oh no," Edo-Wendy said with a grin, "that was actually fine. Gray here seeing my bits, not so fine," she went on, now glaring at the other mage, who was rapidly stuffing his nose with tissue paper, most of which was turning red as he tried to look everywhere but the two girls. Every time he tried to look at them, the image of what they'd walked into a rather what he had walked into, came back to him.

"Why are you here?" Seilah asked looking between the two boys.

“You owe Gray an apology Seilah,” Ranma intoned firmly.

Seilah looked at Gray, then nodded her head slowly. “Yes, I suppose I do at that.”

Several minutes later, Gray walked out of the apartment café, somewhat mollified to Seilah’s continued existence. The apology had been heartfelt, if short, and he honestly believed that she was turning over a new leaf. Gray wasn’t certain whether or not that was because she had suddenly decided she had a sense of morality, or compassion or anything like that. Frankly given the story of how she had survived and worked with the others against Nirvana, it felt more like a something that had started as self-interest only to morph into something more. But, he was fine so long as the conversion remained in place.

the two boys broke parted after leaving the café. Ranma went home and checked in at the apartment, more to make certain that Jenny was kidding about moving in than anything else, although he did take the time to meditate a bit, banishing the sexy image he’d just seen. He was already pretty involved with two ladies, with a third waiting her turn to make her interest plain. *Or at least, I think that’s why Juvia was stalking me before Jenny and I left. Thankfully she doesn’t seem to have noticed I’m back yet. Regardless, three girls are more than enough, I can’t let myself think about two more that way, no matter the sexiness of the image.*

Afterwards however, he decided to find Wendy and see if she wanted to eat at home, or if they were going to eat at the guild.

After searching the town for her for a bit, Ranma slapped himself on the forehead and began heading to Fairy Hills. “Of course. I should’ve search there right off the bat.” As much as she liked being around the people in the Guild, Wendy mostly preferred being around the girls after so many years with only Carla as a female companion. Ranma might have a female body half the time, but he certainly wasn’t feminine in any way unless he had to in order to sneak around on a job. That meant Fairy Hills.

Hopping across the roofs Ranma paused for a second, staring down at Panther Lily and Happy, cocking his head to one side. “What are you two doing?” he asked loudly.

The reason for Ranma’s confusion was the fact that Panther Lily was holding the other cat down. “God damnit Happy, you have to wear pants! Is that so hard to ask! All the Exceed men did back home, didn’t they?”

“That’s only because the girls force them to!” Happy wailed as he wriggled and twisted, trying to get away from the other Exceed’s grip. Since Panther Lily wasn’t in his human form, he was actually making some headway too as he continued to complain. “It itches!”

Panther Lily looked up at Ranma and quick asked “Can you help? I normally wouldn’t bother, but it’s more for his own benefit than anything else. I truly think that Carla is going to

go completely spare on him if he doesn't start wearing pants, and I'd rather not watch murder to occur." He paused, "or be murdered myself if I tried to stop her."

Ranma's eyebrows quirked upwards as he leaped down to land on the snow-dusted road alongside them. "You think Carla could beat you?"

"I've seen her skills when we fought through the Royal Guard in Extalia," the other warrior said bluntly. "I might be more experienced and have a longer reach, but those energy claws of hers... that you apparently taught her," he added balefully, "would make a hash of anything I know of. Including my body."

"Heh, all too true," Ranma said with a chuckle. He reached forward and grabbed up Happy from where he had been about still fly away, holding him by the back of his neck. "Pant him," he ordered. "Murder is a jailing offense, and if Carla went to jail Wendy would be sad, and that just won't do."

"I will have my revenge!" Happy shouted, even as Panther Lily tied the pants up to him and made sure they stayed in place.

Shaking his head, Ranma looked down at Panther Lily as the now pant-wearing Happy flew away. "You think he's really going to try to get revenge on us?" The idea of a cat creature trying to get revenge on him worried Ranma just a bit, considering anew how vindictive Carla could be, and how imaginative when it came to paying back imagined or real slights as the case may be.

Panther Lily shrugged ignorance, and the two parted company a second later, Ranma turned and moved towards the distant Fairy Hills. But he paused once more as he was about to ascend the hill itself, staring, his head slowly cocking to one side in confusion.

On that hill stood Wendy, or rather not on the hill itself. She stood on one side of a giant snow man's head, while Gray stood on the other shoulder, twin ice cannons on his shoulders. Those were so large they came down to his waist, and fired snowball rounds equally as large if the attack he was launching at Natsu and Gajeel were anything to go by.

But it was the snowman that took most of Ranma's attention, for it was easily four stories tall, taller than the Fairy Hills mansion. It had evidently taken a lot of the snow all over the hill, because most of it was bare now. The snowman itself was a simple thing of multiple large snowballs with sticks large enough to look like someone had uprooted young trees. The eyes were made of large pots stuck into the snow, and the mouth another series of sticks.

And it was moving. The bottom of it seemed to be lurching forward as he watched, and Ranma blinked, watching it actually turn and smack a leaping Gajeel away. "How the heck..." he muttered, his head still cocked to the side.

“Vengeance!” Gajeel screamed, bursting out from the rubble of a tree.

“Down with the winter Queen and her vile minion!” shouted Natsu as he leaped around the thing, launching fireballs which were intercepted by Gray’s snowballs.

“Who’s a vile minion!?” Gray shouted back. “And why is she the winter Queen hothead? I’m the one with the firepower here!”

“But I’m the one that built it~,” Wendy caroled, before she used one of her air attacks to completely explode a fireball from Natsu. Gajeel on the other and simply charged forward, only to run into a hail of fire from snowballs that were as large as his upper body. One of them hit him in the face, and clung there instead of breaking apart and he shouted the exact same words Ranma had just used. “How the heck!!”

Two more thudded into his body, and he toppled over, trying to hit into the snow covering him but unable to as Gray cackled evilly. Behold, the amalgamation of my magic, and learning a bit of the snow magic from little pretty boy Eve! The sticky sticky snow!”

Ranma held up a finger as he shouted, “That just sounded wrong Gray, come up with another name!”

“Ranma-nii!” Wendy turned, and waved gleefully. Her face was nearly red from the cold, and her breath came out in gasps. But she seemed elated despite the cold and the obvious effort, Ranma could do nothing but wave back just as enthusiastically.

But that cost her, as Natsu charged forward, his entire body laid up with flames. “I’m burning up! And so too will your vile creation Gray!”

“What’s with the name-calling honestly? And I’m the one who built it!” Wendy pouted, before she stared in shock as Natsu burned his way through several shots from Gray and then slammed into the bottom of her snowman.

Instantly the snowman started to quiver, letting loose a faint sound like a burst pipe, and slowly started to melt. “No!” Wendy shouted hopping away from it. “My snow monster!”

“So...anyone want to explain how this started?” Ranma asked, looking over to one side to a cackling Erza and Mira, as Jenny was simply laid out nearby, curled around her stomach as she nearly shrieked in humor. “And um, is Jenny actually okay right now?”

Mira huffed and smacked her nominal rival opponent on the back of the head. “She’s fine,” she quipped. “And as to this, I have no idea how it started. I arrived in time to see Wendy and Gray positively bury Natsu and Gajeel under snow, and then swat Elfman out of the sky so hard he ended up down by the beach. Which, I might add, he deserved. Honestly calling Wendy a man among men? I know Wendy was trying to build the world’s largest snowman for

a while, but how it began to move, or wide why this evolved into a fight between them, that I have no idea.”

When the other two ladies indicated ignorance as well, Ranma trudged through the slowly freezing water that had once been a snowman, to grab up Wendy who Natsu and Gajeel were trying to grab hold of as she danced and taunted them, seemingly incensed by the destruction of her creation. “Well, how did this happen, imouto?”

“How did what happen?”

“The moving snowman thing. I don’t think that Gray could do that to someone else’s snow creation, and don’t bother trying to give me that innocent look imouto, I know you did something,” Ranma warned, then winked. “I just want to know what the trick was, that’s all.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Wendy said with a nearly Ranma-like smirk, looking away as she palmed a pair of Levy’s glasses. “I especially have no idea what runes that I learned from Mister Freed were doing written into the snowman.”

“Ohoho?” Ranma grinned, as did Natsu and Gajeel at that as he put Wendy on top of his shoulders. “Well, I’d say that was a very interesting and fun way to test out a new magic Wendy, but that if you need those glasses, I’ll get you your own pair. And I feel that you have earned yourself a hot chocolate.”

“Woo!” Wendy shouted, throwing her hands in the air in delight. “With cinnamon?”

“If I can find some cinnamon,” Ranma said with a nod.

She whooped again, then hopped off his shoulders and raced off to find Carla, grinning and cheerful despite the fact that bits of her looked as if they were about to freeze and fall off. Laughing Ranma ran after her and proceeded to scoop her back up onto his shoulders as they raced on, while all the women of Fairy Hills looked on with smiles.

The next day, Jenny and Mira had decided to go off in the early morning to have a sparring match, with Erza as their referee. Laxus was still getting used to his Second Origin powers, and pushing Natsu and Gajeel through their paces barely took a few hours since the two of them had somehow found themselves in a drinking contest with Cana the evening before. After dropping both green-looking men at the guildhall Ranma went over to Porlyusica’s hut in the woods, finding Wendy still there since he had dropped her off that morning. “How’s it going?” he asked looking down at his little sister.

“Pretty well,” Wendy said with a nod. “We spend a few hours in the morning going over medical things, then she watches as I practice the moves Grandeeney left me. They’re okay I guess, but most of why I like them is well...” she pulled out a sheet of papers and thrust them under Ranma’s nose.

He took a sniff and nodded slowly. Some of that scent was the same as what he got from Wendy, light, fragrant vanilla almost, with a hint of thundercloud. The rest was deeper, stormy or, more powerful, and oddly reminded Ranma of the air one breathed went up on high mountain.

“They actually smell like your mother, don’t they?” he queried looking down at Wendy.

Wendy nodded and hug them to her. “Yep. I don’t know how, my mama couldn’t write, after all. Unless she wrote on huge pieces of paper, and then they were shrunk?”

“Well?” Ranma asked looking over at the Porlyusica.

She scowled. “My alter self held me sort of hostage as I wrote those out, so obviously they smell like her. I was held in her claws as I wrote them after all. Freaking pushy female.”

“That works, Ranma said with a nod, not making the obvious comment there. Getting hit by a broom was more annoying than anything but that was enough thanks. “But can I take back Wendy now?”

“What for?” Porlyusica questioned, her eyes narrowing.

“For her physical training of course Ranma said with a grin. “I think, that I’m going to start teaching you some Tai Chi, and Yoga Wendy.”

She cocked her head thoughtfully. “Yoga, you’ve mentioned that it’s, some kind of body movement exercise, right?”

“Yep. As your growing, your body will start to go through changes, and you’ll slowly become less mobile and dexterous, if we don’t start adding more flexibility exercise into your regimen. I want to make sure we start you on these early. They helped me a lot,” Ranma described with a grin as he bent backwards from the waist in such a way that even a contortionist would’ve gone ‘oh, I say!’

Then he did a flip up to one hand, held himself there parallel to the ground, lowered himself down, and curl until his body was back upright again. “Flexibility, see.”

Wendy nodded. She hadn’t ever had to move like that to dodge blows or anything of that nature, she was small enough that she could dodge pretty easily as it was thanks to her ability with her air attacks. But still, it looked fun so she nodded eagerly, then looked over at Porlyusica, who huffed irritably.

“Get on with you, but I expect you to have made some actual progress in that one attack you tried out this morning. And I expect this one to not be here the next time you are. You know how I hate humans.”

“In my defense, I have no idea if I actually qualify for being one any longer,” Ranma replied drolly.

She snorted and turned away, gesturing them away with a sweep of her broom. As they went, Ranma’s advanced hearing heard her mutter something about actions speaking louder than body type, and that human wasn’t just a phrase, but a state of mind.

He couldn’t argue with that, and with Wendy on his head once more, he picked up Carla at the outskirts of the small clearing where Wendy had been taking lessons from Porlyusica and headed back to Magnolia. From there they went to their apartment, where Ranma had put up an awning, as well as some cloth walls around the large patio. In this way he had sort of created a training area, heated by two small fires in opposite corners.

Ranma had Wendy dress in some small skintight leotards, which oddly enough, he had been loaned by Anna of all people. Why the girl had so many obscure outfits (she even had a Japanese schoolgirl’s uniform for goodness sake) Ranma refused to speculate on.

Regardless, Wendy liked it, even though she pouted a little as she stared down at her chest patting its disconsolately. “Easy there Wendy, you’re only pushing twelve. You’ll grow,” Ranma said laughingly.

She pouted even worse at that, and Ranma rolled his eyes, ruffling her hair affectionately “you’ll grow,” he repeated. “Trust me there’s worse things than having a smaller chest. But you’ll grow eventually, don’t be in such a hurry. Unless you’re telling me...” he backed away hurriedly, both hands going up to his cheeks as he made a horrified expression “that puberty is coming on you already! Do I have to start beating boys off with my escrima sticks?”

Ranma was not joking about that. If he had to beat off guys from coming after Wendy, he fully intended them to stay beaten.

She pouted for a few seconds longer than laughed, shaking her head. “No, I mean I know boys can be cute, but other than looking I don’t care that much. You, Natsu, Gajeel-san and Laxus-san, are more than enough boys to hang around with.” Wendy had long forgotten her momentary crush on the prince of Bosco.

“Good,” Ranma said with a theatrical sigh of relief before moving into a stance. “Now, assume this position and we’ll start with some Tai Chi. You already know a bit of it, so it’ll make an easier segue into Yoga.”

About forty minutes later, they were still going through some new Tai Chi exercises, when a knock on the door to the apartment interrupted them.

Ranma blinked, then moved over to open it finding Juvia standing there. "Hello Ranma, Juvia was wondering what you're up to today."

Mindful of the fact that the Water Mage had espoused an interest in him and Erza hadn't instantly taken umbrage, (and frankly he had to admit she was freaking beautiful and funny and he liked her,) Ranma gestured her inside. "Wendy and I are just training, but it's nothing that can't be put off for a few hours if you have something you want to do."

"What kind of training?" Juvia asked brightly. While she wasn't as enthusiastic about it as Erza or even Jenny, Juvia did take some to pride in her abilities as a mage, and training to better oneself was always a good idea in her opinion.

"It's called Tai Chi, and then we'll be moving on to something called Yoga."

"Show me," Juvia said with a smile and a bounce to her step.

Ranma led the way out onto the patio. With two fires roaring inside, the makeshift training area was actually decently heated, if not hot.

She watched for a few moments as the extremely lithe, flexible Ranma moved through a few Yoga exercises for Wendy, then urged the girl to practice them. A blush suffused her features as she wondered exactly how flexible Ranma really was, before she shook that thought off, and asked hesitantly, "May Juvia join you?"

"Sure, so long as you have some exercise gear or something you can move around in easily."

"Juvia does. Juvia will go and grab it, then come back here to change if she may? It is rather cold out to walk about wearing such after all."

Ranma laughed at that nodding his head. "Sure, I can see that."

Unfortunately for Ranma's blood pressure however, Juvia was back and Ranma had completely neglected to think about what a stretched leotard would look like on a woman with Juvia's figure rather than a little girl like Wendy. Juvia's leotard was blue naturally enough, and skintight on her legs and chest, which was large, larger than Ranma's female form, larger than Jenny's, if not up to Erza. But they were fuller than Erza's, which were more toned and perky thanks to the amount of muscle Erza had on her upper body. Juvia was softer, not as soft looking as Edo-Wendy, but still softer, fuller bodied than Erza. And the leotard showed both that and the fact that despite that, Juvia didn't seem to have much fat at all elsewhere on her body save perhaps in her rear, which looked to be a full, bouncy, delightful, handful.

For her part, if not for the euphoria of the Tai Chi exercises and Yoga she had begun to practice, Wendy would have fallen into a funk at the sight of her, but instead she simply sighed, and moved into the next technique.

Staring at Juvia as she walked in front of him onto the patio Ranma gulped, and he knew that Juvia heard him do it, because she looked back at him, flushed, before straightening her back than she, almost thrusting her chest out as she turned to him. "How would you like Juvia to begin?"

Ranma emitted another groan at that image in front of him, his teeth grinding together as he fought for control. *Wendy's here, don't jump the sexy bluenette, Wendy's here, don't jump the sexy Water Mage. Right., right.* "Um, why don't stand next to Wendy for a minute. Do you know any breathing exercises? When Juvia nodded, Ranma said why don't you go through those and a five-minute warmup. After that, I'll start you up on some limbering exercises, then you can join Wendy on her second circuit through the normal beginners Yoga.

Juvia nodded, a smile of victory on her face, even as she watched through tender eyes as Ranma moved over to Wendy, correcting her kata, gently helping her out with this other position that she had gotten stuck in, touching a few spots on her back and lower thigh that seemed to help ease some tensions.

Contrary to the way he acted with his other students, with Wendy he was tender, gentle, and above all, **loving**. The sight took her breath away, and Juvia thought to herself *that's another checkmark next to Ranma's name for certain* with a certain amount of smug pride. *Juvia has chosen very well Juvia thinks.*

Several hours later she approached Ranma, sore beyond belief but oddly related. The Yoga was fascinating, even if the Tai Chi was a little too about inner peace and tranquility for her tastes. Wendy had raced off for the shower, practically beaming with the same amount of inner energy and sore but happy muscles that Juvia was feeling despite all her previous training. Ranma had very obviously pushed her harder than he had Juvia though, something that Juvia vowed to change if these sessions continued.

"You're an excellent father with Wendy you know," she revealed, her voice soft as she moved to put an arm around Ranma's side, blushing at the contact. She was never usually as forward as she had been in Edolas and finding herself alone with the object of her desires was not doing her any favors.

Ranma blinked at that, shaking his head with a laugh. "Nah I'm not her Dad or anything like that. I'm her big brother, I've been very clear about that all along."

"Yes, she calls you big brother, you call her little sister. Labels do not change what is it. Are you or are you not the primary caregiver?" she said holding up a finger in front of Ranma's face. Are you or are you not the primary educator?" Another finger. "Are you or are you not

the person who has watched over her for more than half of her life at this point on your own?" A third finger went up. "Regardless of your initial relationship, you have become her father in truth."

Eyes narrowed, Juvia used her ring finger to poke Ranma in the chest. "Juvia knows that Ranma is not so foolish as to not have already realized this. That means to Juvia that Ranma is deliberately not admitting it. Why not? What is the problem with recognizing her as your daughter?"

Ranma winced. It'd been a while since anyone had actually put all that together, but he supposed that he should have thought someone besides the queen of Bosco would do so eventually. "Well for one thing, I'm still young."

"That is not an argument either. Yes you're still young, but not all that young to start a family." The water mage watched as Ranma flinched, and then slowly nodded. "Ahh, so that is it. Juvia understands now. It isn't so much that you don't see her as a daughter, it's that you don't want to see **anyone** as your child, is that right? You have issues with the idea of being a father."

"Has anyone told you you're very perceptive? A little too perceptive?" Ranma muttered, looking away,"

"Several people back in Juvia's old guild said much the same thing," Juvia said thoughtfully. "But do not think that your anger is going to dissuade Juvia. Besides, a problem shared is a problem lessened."

Ranma shrugged, and looked around, but since they were inside the apartment, there was no one else around which he could use as an excuse to not answer. "Well," he said slowly for one thing, "I'm not only young, I'm going to stay that way for very long time."

Juvia blinked. "Juvia is sorry, but what?"

"We've talked about ki before, back in Edolas, remember? Well, part of what ki does that magic doesn't is that, the more you have, the better you can heal. Eventually, if you have enough of it, your ki can slow down the aging process, so much it almost stops. I used to know of four hundred-year-old mummy who despite looking like a raisin that time forgot stuck on a stick was still alive and sprightly. And the only reason she looked like that is because she discovered how to manipulated ki so late in life. I didn't. So, I'm going to be young for a long time," Ranma retorted.

Juvia nodded slowly. "That is interesting, but I don't see how it pertains to any children you might have. Surely you wouldn't begrudge your child or his mother the same training you received if in a different manner. Juvia has heard some stories from you and others about your ratfink bastard of a father."

Then the other shoe dropped, and she stared at Ranma "Is that another reason? Your father and how he acted towards you?"

"Kind of," Ranma said shaking his head slowly. "I mean yeah, I'm sort of worried that you know if I have a kid, I'll turn out to be the same kind of father my old man was. Even my mom... well... look I'm just worried about what I'll pass on to my kid. My father was a lazy asshole sometimes, and hell I know I can be if I get a chance, and I'm also way too martial arts mad, I don't have much in the way of understanding how to be normal, how to fit in or whatever and, well, so yeah I um, I don't want kids that's all. I don't think it's a good idea," he said his words stumbling over one another as he attempted to put his thoughts, his fear, on the matter into order. "I mean a part of me thinks it might be nice but I don't think that is, I'm not..."

"You do not think you are ready," Juvia stated with a nod but she was smiling faintly in amusement as she looked at him, instead of the sympathetic or understanding look, he thought to see there. And when was the last time you were ready for a challenge that you could see coming, Ranma?"

Ranma blinked at that, and then Juvia leaned forward kissing him. **Hard.** Not a second into the kiss, her tongue was in his mouth, and she was kissing him as if their lives depended on it, with extra points given for tongue action and trying to remove his already-removed tonsils.

Pulling away she smiled through an almost luminescent blush as she spoke. "You are an idiot, she said, with amusement rather than heat in her tone. 'You are worried over nothing. You have already proven that you are not your father in how you treat Wendy. You're an idiot, but a lovable idiot," she repeated kissing him again much gentler this time, although whether or not that was because she was feeling more gentle, or if it was because Ranma was still poleaxed from her last tongue kiss, Ranma didn't know.

Pulling back she spoke again, one hand gesturing toward the bathroom. "Your treatment of Wendy has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are not your father. So you are lazy, so what? Lots of people are lazy sometimes. So you are martial arts mad, again so what? That kind of dedication is important in life to get anywhere. Your mother might be crazy, that part Juvia will give you," she said with a laugh. "Juvia has not heard you speak of her before. However, even in that event, you are giving the girls who might want children with you eventually far too little credit. Do you honestly think any girl that you are currently involved or attracted to would ever allow you or anyone else to put their child through what you went through? To treat their child in such a manner?"

She kissed him again, this time softer, and Ranma finally responded, kissing her back ardently, his hands going around her waist, lifting her up off her feet slightly to continue to kiss at an even level.

When they pulled back again, Juvia smiled at him gently as she set her feet back on the ground. "Juvia is not saying it should be now. Juvia is not interested in becoming a mother yet, and she doubts that Erza or even Jenny would be willing to give up what they would have to give up to become a mother just yet either. But you should be more open to the idea of family, of settling down in the future."

"But I like traveling," he protested weakly.

"You like traveling, or do you like learning?" Juvia asked shrewdly.

"It's been the same thing in this world," Ranma replied with a shrug. "And I really like seeing new places too."

"But it doesn't have to be," she retorted. "Or can you honestly tell me could tell Juvia that you have learned any new martial arts or magic in the past year and a half of traveling before coming to Magnolia?"

Ranma frowned and looked away, and she chuckled hugging him tightly making a point of smooshing her chest against his. She was blushing again however, and her courage was slowly starting to fade, from her earlier exertions. She backed away slightly looking at Ranma's chest rather than those blue eyes of his.

"I'll think about it," Ranma said with a sigh. "But I really do like traveling. That's not me trying to run away, that's not me imitating my old man, that the life I was born into practically, that's part of what I love to do."

Juvia shrugged. "Juvia has never traveled for farther than to Iceberg once, so Juvia would be amenable to seeing what traveling with Ranma is like. Moreover, it is not the only thing you love. Surely traveling all the time isn't necessary? So again, it does not seem to be an insurmountable issue."

Chuckling Ranma shook his head, silently conceding the point. Wendy came in then, with Carla, who had just arrived back home from having tea with Jenny and the Edolas pair. "Ranma, is it okay if I go over to the new café? I want to see what it's like, it sounded fun when Seilah described it, and I haven't seen her for a few days."

"Sure imouto," Ranma said, moving over and ruffling her hair. "You did great on those exercises by the way. We'll keep doing some Yoga in the morning, and then Tai Chi at night to help you go to sleep. I think it'll also help you with your meditations, and that in turn can help you build up your magical core even further than you already have, plus make learning those new techniques of yours easier. Sound good?"

"Yep," Wendy confirmed, holding up a hand and Ranma grinned, exchanging a high five with the girl.

Through it out all of this, Juvia stood to one side, one eyebrow raised and a tender smile on her face.

Ranma caught it as he moved back towards the bedroom holding their grabbing up the things Wendy would need for her latest sleepover. "Don't start that again," he warned, even as his mouth twitched into a wry smile.

"Juvia didn't say anything," Juvia nearly sang, winking at him as she made for the door.

OOOOOOO

That night, Wendy and Carla did indeed head over to the book-cafe, where she found Seilah and Edo-Wendy, looking around the place and arguing with one another about colors of all things. "Excellent," her older, alter-self said as the younger girls entered. "You can be our tiebreaker Wendy."

"I find that concept distinctly suspect," Seilah said her eyes narrowing from her customary welcoming smile for the youngest Dragon Slayer. "Wendy is after all you in alter-persona, does that not mean she will choose the same colors you have?"

"Not entirely, I mean our ages are so different, and our manners are so different, I think our colored scheme will be different to." Admittedly colors did seem to cross over, Edo-Wendy admitted internally. *The Strauss twins liked the same color combinations, the two Miras as well, heck, even Jet and Droy seem to like the same colors as their alters, despite not having anything else in common with them. I still can't get over that, our guild's strongest is the weakest team here? And not because of magic or because everyone else is stronger, though that last is true. But rather their personalities are as different as the two Elfman before this world's Elfman went to work on Edolas.*

"So, what color do you think we should have as wallpaper? Cream, light green or brown?" she asked, gesturing to the walls and the bookshelves.

Wendy frowned looking around too, then said hesitantly, "Well I think cream is an... okay color, but it's a little bland. Maybe mix it in with some blues? And make the chairs brown leather," she said with a firm nod of her head. "I like leather, it's soft. And durable, which is always a good thing given life with Ranma-nii."

Carla, who had not been asked her opinion, spoke up from where she had been moving around the space, nodding to herself. "You should ask Jenny her opinion. She seems to have excellent taste in colors and interior design. Beyond that, I would suggest that you be wary of

having too much of any one color. Brown leather is good, as Wendy said, but you should also think about having curtains that you can close in various ways so as to keep a homey, open atmosphere without letting in too much light or being too open at night.”

The two older women looked at one another and Edo-Wendy nodded as Seilah spoke. “While that did not break the tie, but it sure gave us something to think about.”

Edo-Wendy shrugged her shoulders, cracking her neck explosively. “Agreed. Hopefully we can start moving on with decorating the interior soon though. We want to have a big end of the year opening, so we’re in kind of a rush. I am going to head over to Fairy Hills myself tonight. Levy and Evergreen wanted to ask me some questions about back home, what about you?” she asked, looking at the demon girl.

Seilah shrugged, looking over at Wendy. “Are you still wishing to stay the night?”

She nodded firmly, and then smiled as the door opened and Katerina came in, looking around, her eyes narrowed. “There isn’t anything perverted going on in here is there?”

“Not at the moment,” Edo-Wendy said with a chuckle shaking her head as her younger self cocked her head to one side, a question mark almost visible in the air above her as she looked at the three older women while Carla stiffened, her cat-like eyes narrowing in her human-like face.

“I thought you had gotten a room at Fairy Hills,” Seilah said snidely. “Why ever have you come back?”

Katerina scowled in as genteel a manner you could imagine, although she pointed her closed parasol at Seilah in a very business-like manner. “I’ll have you know I have indeed asked Father to purchase a room at the dorms for me, but by the time we had paid for it, it was too late to buy furniture for it. So, I will be living here for a few more days’ time. During which I wish to make it clear that I will expect a certain level of decorum from both my roommates.”

“Not me. I am going to be spending the night with Evergreen and the others trying out this new plum brandy she bought,” Edo-Wendy said with an eyeroll at the prude’s attitude. “That way you’ll know nothing’s going to happen.”

Katerina’s eyes narrowed, looking between her and Seilah, then down to Wendy before finally nodding. “I suppose I can say with certainty that as long as Wendy is here, my own virtue is safe. If only because Ranma would no doubt tear your head off if you corrupted young Wendy in any way.”

Carla laughed evilly, looking at them all. “Ahaahhh you only think you’re exaggerating. You really aren’t, believe me. And that’s only if I don’t get to you first.” The fact her hands were suddenly glowing with blue ki lent her words special emphasis.

Later that night, Wendy sighed happily as she nuzzled into Seilah's large chest, mumbling happily. The two of them and Katerina had spent the evening cooking these nifty spiced meat pies for dinner followed by Carla and Wendy making the older girls a salad, while Katerina had told them all about voyages she had taken at sea on various ships, from a simple merchant ship all the way up to a cruise ship. Then they had all taken out books Seilah had bought about design and compared various cafes to one another before Katerina had retired to her bed. Carla had followed, wanting to get up early the next day to try and find Jenny before she headed out with the others to train for the day.

This left Seilah and Wendy to themselves, and they had promptly picked out a book and went to bed themselves, with Wendy cuddling into Seilah's chest and the older woman's arms going around her stomach. "This is nice."

"It is," Seilah replied, looking down at her from where she had been reading the same book.

"Why was Katerina talking about corruption and perversion, anyway? Did Gray stop by, or Gildarts? I understand from Cana that her dad's... well I'm not supposed to use the word she did to describe him," Wendy said with a slightly embarrassed giggle.

Seilah's lips quirked, amused that one of the guilds stronger mages, and indeed their strongest, were more known to Wendy by their apparent perversions than their magic or personalities. "No, nothing really happened. Nothing permanent as Katerina seems to think it might have become. Your alter-self was simply experimenting," the older woman replied with a shrug that caused Wendy's current pillow to shift under her head. "And I needed an outlet."

"That doesn't tell me anything you know," Wendy said with a pout.

"Yes, I do know," Seilah said with a nod. I don't want to find out if Katerina or Carla was correct about Ranma's reaction to us if we attempt to educate you before your time in certain matters."

"Oh, it's that kind of thing," Wendy proclaimed with a nod, her face taking on a thoughtful expression. "Between two girls? Like Lucy and Cana?" The two girls were open about their relationship to a certain degree, and Wendy thought they were cute together. *Although why Gildarts can't look at the two of them together without then smacking his head into something – which invariably breaks the something he smacks it into, I don't know.*

Although on the other hand... that was my alter-self Seilah was kissing and stuff. That was as far as Wendy's knowledge of such things went. There was kissing, and there was stuff. She knew there was more than kissing, but what it was she had no idea other than it involved getting naked. *That's kind of... I don't really know what to think about that really. On the one hand it's weird, but kind of cool since I can hope to grow up to look like that, maybe. If I drink*

enough milk. On the other, it's sort of weird and on the third paw, it's none of my business because while she might have been my alter-self, that doesn't mean we're the same person.

"Yes, although as I said it was not a sign of a permanent relationship, or even a temporary one," Seilah replied to Wendy's question, going into slightly more detail now that she knew Wendy knew at least the outline of what they were talking about despite not knowing the real mechanics of it. "Does that bother you?" she asked, a frown crossing her face for some reason as that thought occurred to her.

"Nope," Wendy declined with shake of her head and a little giggle as she burrowed backwards deeper into Seilah's chest. "After all, my big brother is a girl half the time, so that would be kind of silly for me to be bothered by wouldn't it?" Seilah laughed at that one, one of the few genuine laughs but she had ever had, and Wendy turned around, hugging the older girl as she looked up at her from where she was nestled within Seilah's chest. "You've got a nice laugh you know."

Seilah flushed at that, and Wendy asked "So you're not going to do anything more with Katerina?"

"No."

"Or anyone else? Have you given up on Ranma?" Wendy asked. She hadn't done anything about it, but from the moment Seilah turned good and they had gotten to know one another on the trip into Desierto and the mountains of Joya, Wendy had been rooting for the demon girl. She liked Seilah, they liked the same sort of books, she was decently strong, funny even when she wasn't trying to be, and she liked to eat just as much as Wendy, who had somehow inherited her big brother's appetite. That and Seilah smelled nice and was soft and nice to rest her head on.

"That, alas, is probably not going to happen," Seilah said with a sigh. "And no, I'm not going to try to experiment with anyone else. I have decided that while physical affection is nice, it is nothing to the feelings of emotional connections." She put one arm around young Wendy, hugging her back. "That is why something like this is almost as nice as what Katerina and I were doing."

Wendy nuzzled deeper into Seilah's bust, and the warm fuzzy feeling Seilah was feeling grew again, while Wendy blushed a little. "That's good I guess. I like emotional connections too," she said with a grin. But then she cocked her head as she looked up at Seilah. "Why do you think you and Ranma Nii aren't going to get together though? I mean not to put too fine a point on or anything, but your well you, and he is a guy. I've heard that all sorts of things about guys and how girls can get them to notice them even if the guy isn't interested at first."

"True, and I have read some of those things myself. But a long-term relationship, which is what I wish, I very much prefer stability, must be built upon more than physical attraction. It

must be built upon shared hopes for the future as well as character compatibility. What Ranma and I want out of our lives are two very different things.” *And he believes our personalities are incompatible. I am uncertain I believe that, but I also know that I am a jealous sort and would not like sharing as Erza and the others have apparently decided to,* Seilah thought.

She then cocked her head thoughtfully looking down at Wendy struck by a sudden thought. “Have you thought about what you want out of your life?”

Wendy frowned, thinking, then shook her head. “No, I don’t think I’ve thought about it much. But I suppose well... I like this,” she said, snuggling back down into Seilah’s chest. “Some more of this would be nice in the short term anyway.”

Seilah actually released a real chuckle at that, ruffling her hair. “You really are a cuddle monster, aren’t you?”

Wendy simply shrugged in response, and they both turned their attention back to the adventure book. But their smiles didn’t go away.

I’m effectively immortal, Seilah thought to herself *I can afford to wait. And if she is deciding that she thinks girls are just as fun to hang around with as boys, that is most decidedly a step in the right direction.*

OOOOOOO

The next day, it started snowing almost the moment the sun started to rise. And unlike the snowfalls that had occurred in the past few days, this one was the kind of heavy, large snowflakes type of snowfall that told everyone with a brain it going to linger for a while and pile up everywhere. Worse, the temperature had dropped precipitously. Before this it was merely cold out, now it was heading towards bitter.

Despite that however, Ranma was up early, heading over to pick up Wendy for breakfast, where he found out that yes, Edo-Cana was a darn good cook, better than him in many ways. From there it was away to drop her off at Porlyusica’s place, for her daily training. With no sign that his two victims – he called them his students, but both felt the term victim fitted far better – were able to get up, Ranma made a note to be harder on them the next day, then returned to watch Wendy train, sparring very lightly with Carla, Panther Lily and, oddly, Happy, in the meantime.

Apparently, the young blue-furred cat wanted to learn how to be stronger on his own, something Ranma was happy to see. Carla in turn complimented Happy on wearing pants and

'suggested' he keep doing so. The compliment and the pat on the head seemed to do the trick though, so both Panther Lily and Ranma were happy with their intervention the day before.

When the trio returned to the apartment, they found Erza and Juvia both there. The fact they both were inside the apartment with no sign that the lock had been fiddled with made Ranma scowl lightly, but Juvia addressed him before he could comment on it, turning from talking quietly to Erza as the three apartment owners walked up to the two women. "Juvia said you mentioned to Wendy that you would be teaching her Yoga in the mornings, from now on. Juvia was hoping that perhaps Juvia could join you for that," Juvia announced.

"Whereas I," said Erza tapping her metal clad chest, "was wondering if you and Wendy would like to go out on a job with me. It shouldn't take us more than half a day or so to get there and back, but it is a job I would like to have a Dragon Slayers nose on, and the boys are in my doghouse at the moment."

Ranma and Juvia both paused, while Wendy giggled at the idea of the two other Dragon Slayers dressed up like dogs. *I wonder what kind of dogs they would be? I think that Natsu would be a big Newfoundland, and Gajeel a bulldog, big tough independent, but also likes his scratches. And Natsu's big tough, but more likely to just jump on you and then sit on you than have a really dangerous bite.*

Ranma raised a finger in question. "Do you mean they are figuratively in your doghouse, or you have literally stuck them into a doghouse. Only with you Erza, I'm never quite certain how far you'll take your punishments for someone."

Erza blinked, then smiled. "Actually, that's not a bad idea. The next time one of them bugs me, I will do that very thing thank you Ranma," she said brightly.

Sending the two just no- boys a heartfelt mental apology, Ranma asked, "Aheh, what did they do to get on your bad side this time?"

"They destroyed my strawberry shortcake yesterday," she said grimly. Her knuckles cracking. "Not just once. Once would've been worthy of a beating. Not just twice, twice would've been worthy of both beatings and being forced to clean up after themselves. No, counting this morning they have done it **three times** in two days."

Wendy nodded. "I think that the winter is kind of getting to them both for some reason. The only time that Natsu isn't actually fighting one of the other boys is when he's around Anna and Lisa."

Ranma frowned "are you talking like he's in some kind of mating season or something? Because if so, I sure never felt it."

“Regardless, would you mind helping me with this mission? It isn’t S-class, but it is paying very well,” Erza asked. “We’ll only be gone a single night at best.”

Cocking her head, Ranma looked over at Wendy who, after several minutes of hesitation, pouted, shaking her head. “Not me, sorry. I am really close to getting one of my mother’s special attacks down, and I don’t want to lose my momentum by missing a day. I’d like to, but it’s just not going to happen right now. Ranma-nii can go though.”

Carla immediately chimed in, shaking her head. “No. I spoke to Jenny early this morning and the two of us will start going over designs for the apartment this afternoon. I was very serious about that project Ranma. With winter on us, this place must become as homey as the tent is, especially since you are going to be taking it with you again, I presume?”

“You sure imouto?” Ranma asked, faintly frowning, once more feeling pride at Wendy’s growing independence and regret about the same thing.

“Mmhm. But when you get back, I expect to spend an entire day with you, okay?” Wendy said, pouting and not exactly happy with her nii-chan leaving again, if only for a day. She wasn’t about to get in the way of him and Erza though. Beyond Seilah, she liked Erza the best of the girls who were/had been involved with Ranma.

“Agreed,” Ranma replied with a grin. “If there’s enough snow on the ground maybe we can try our hand at building a snow city again. Could be fun. And I suppose you’re staying behind will let me shop for a present for your birthday.”

She laughed as she turned away to go get changed. “I look forward to finding them ahead of when you’ll actually give them to me again this year,” she sang causing Ranma to mock growl after her.

Juvia chuckled shaking her head. *Yep, definitely her father.*

“Excellent. We can leave after lunch. In the meantime, I think I want to try this Yoga of yours,” Erza said.

Ranma shrugged and told her to change into an outfit that she could stretch and pose in. While Erza simply Requipped into a pair of long leggings and a tight white shirt, Wendy came out of the tent dressed in her leotard and carrying enough clothing for the rest of the day and the next. Juvia ended up being the slowest, heading into the bathroom to change herself.

The training of the three girls in Yoga went about as well as the day before had with Juvia and Wendy. Erza got most of the stances instantly and had decent body control already, although she did need to work on her flexibility quite a bit, more so than Juvia, whose training had been more focused on not getting hit than strength as it was in Erza’s case. But watching the two of them practice Yoga was most decidedly not good for Ranma’s self-control, and he

knew that he had been unable to hide his physical reaction to them several times, if their smiles and blushes were anything to go by.

Gah, freaking, I swear if Erza bites her lip one more time I'm going to lose it, Ranma thought, turning aside quickly. Thankfully neither woman seemed to take umbrage at his reaction to them, and Ranma breathed a sigh of relief. *I'm still getting used to the fact that here I'm not going to be smashed upside the head or completely neutered for showing a stiffy he thought to himself. But damn it, this is getting to be too much.*

Later on, Jenny stopped in to speak with Carla and spend time with Wendy. He asked the blonde to watch out for Wendy and Carla while he was gone on a mission with Erza, and Jenny sent him such a salacious smirk that Ranma had to literally duck behind the kitchen's bar to stop Wendy from spotting his body's instant reaction. "Sure, I'll watch Wendy for you, although I would say Carla could do that just as well on her own. Still, you go and have f~u~n~," she whispered giving the word an extra sexy emphasis somehow causing Ranma to shudder.

Thankfully the cold weather outside served almost as well as a cold shower would have without the sex change, so by the time Ranma met up with Erza at the guild, he was back in control of his himself again. Moments later they were on their way racing along a road for now. Erza was wearing some kind of modification to the outfit she'd been wearing earlier that day, with a warmer looking pair of long leggings matched with heavy boots, and a heavy fur coat. The coat was lined with metal pieces here and there that probably marked it as an actual suit of armor. On her back, she carried a hunting spear, and at her belt was a skinning dagger. On her head was also a hunter's cap, its edges folded down to cover her ears.

Ranma thought hiding her hair was a freaking travesty though, that blood red hair of hers was just amazing to look at. *And to feel through his fingers* Ranma thought as he made plans to do just that that night. "So, what are we going on this mission?" he asked to get his mind off such things.

"It's an espionage type mission," Erza responded. "A group of mages think that another group of mages are horning in on their territory, undercutting their earning by selling the same type of product only far weaker and much more cheaply without a license to do so. That's illegal in Fiore of course: you can't deal in magical items without licenses issued by the Magic Council. And as to why I am taking such an easy mission am doing this I need the money to pay for my last few armors."

"Really? I thought you had all of them paid out?"

"I had most of them paid out except for the two newest experimental sets," Erza replied leaping over a fallen log. She had just led the way off the road. At the same time above them the snow continued to fall. It was already a few inches deep on the ground, piling on what snow there had been there already. It crunched underneath their shoes as they raced along,

and they would have to detour around large snowdrifts but it certainly wouldn't slow them down. Not until it was at least a few feet deep for certain.

"The blacksmith at Heart Kreuz said he would give them to me since I'm such a good customer but I refused. I feel that would be too much like being in debt to someone. And when it comes to money, I'm not going to let that occur," Erza finished.

Ranma nodded, then Erza asked, "So what kind of birthday present do you want to buy Wendy?"

"I don't know, but this year I'd actually like to keep it a secret whatever it is," Ranma said with a sigh. "She always finds out where I hide them. At first it was a game, but then I found her actually sticking her head in my ki space, and actually finding the dang thing in there, which should honestly have been impossible. The only place I think I could hide it is in my Requip space, since obviously that at least is mine and she can't actually access it. But I feel as if that would be cheating almost."

"Can you hide them in other people's houses or apartments?"

"Sure, I tried that a few times," Ranma said with a morose scowl. "One time, I hid it out in the forest of Bosco where we were staying – we have a nifty tree house back of beyond there - and she still found it."

"She might be able to smell it out if you've touched, you are both Dragon Slayers after all."

"That explains that time sure, but what about the time I hid it on a rooftop in a city after having showered? On the rooftop of a tannery?"

"That one I'll give you," Erza said with a sweatdrop. Those places stunk to high heaven and should have covered any other scent.

"Oh thank you my lady." Ranma grumbled, "Now help me figure's a what I'm going to buy her and how to hide it afterward."

"How about we work under the assumption that it is your smell somehow. Perhaps not, a physical scent, but one you leave behind in the air you move through, a magical residue or something," Erza said, the mystery intriguing her as they began to brainstorm between them. "If that is the case, perhaps hiding it in a river, you'd have to keep whatever it is dry of course, but the water would dilute your scent or whatever else is allowing her to track it."

Forty minutes later as they continued to race through the winter-clad forest, their conversation then shifted into Ranma's and Erza's armors, and whether she had been able to wake up Belserion's' spirit yet. She had in fact had some success there, waking Belserion up

twice, but both times the spirit had simply fallen asleep again quickly, not even able to answer any questions or tell any stories before collapsing back into unconsciousness.

It was annoying, but Erza felt that if she had enough magical power, she could recharge Belserion's spirit within the sword form he had shifted his physical body into. That was partly why she was willing to go through the training for Second Origin like Laxus and the fact that she wouldn't have to worry about retraining herself control as much as Laxus would.

"How is he doing on that by the way. I haven't seen him since I got back from my trip with Jenny. I was hoping he'd be up for a spar by now," Ranma said, scowling slightly.

Erza chuckled. "If you asked him, probably well enough but you know he wouldn't tell you the truth. He's not doing well in treating his self-control at all. Master Makarov told him to use his lightning to travel from one foot to another in that lightning teleportation spell of his, and instead he appears three blocks away, smashing out a wall. He tries to pick up a teacup, and lightning literally melts it in his hand somehow. He picks up a fork, the lightning starts arcing along it so much it looks like it was hit by a continuous lightning blast."

"Ouch," Ranma muttered, his tone one of wry understanding. The same thing had happened to him after all. "That sounds really annoying."

"I know, thank God I'm not going through it," Erza replied, her own tone reeking of smug complacency.

Ranma frowned then quickly dipped down, grabbing up a chunk of snow and creating a snowball which he then flicked out expertly to splat into the side of Erza's hat covered head. "I find your lack of empathy disturbing."

Her head coming around like a cannon mount, Erza's scowled at him, before her spear flashed down into the snow, sending a wave of snow up at Ranma. "Have at thee!"

For several hours thereafter the sound of the mother of all snowball fights echoed throughout the forest, even as they continued on their way. And when they arrived at the city the mission had been sent from, both participants were drenched in snow.

The mission itself wasn't much. As Erza had described, they'd been hired to find a group of mages selling low quality enchanted gems without a license. The only reason the local guards couldn't have dealt with it was because the criminals had apparently nearly beaten to death another mage and two guards. This had emboldened the criminals to the point where they were literally threatening the real mages out of business.

Yet to Ranma and Erza they were nothing at all. Ranma was able to use his nose to find them after sniffing some of their products. Then Erza had just simply bashed her way into the warehouse they had converted to be their headquarters and between the two of them they

dragged the mages kicking and screaming to the nearest Rune Knights garrison several dozen miles away.

The sun was just starting to set by the time they finished, but the snow was still falling and there was at least ten inches or more on the ground by this point.

“So,” Ranma said looking up at the sun and then over at Erza. “That took a bit longer than I expected, even if the fight wasn’t worth writing home about. So, what do you want to do? Do you want to try to head home, or do you want to find someplace around here?”

“I would like to spend the night in your tent again I think,” Erza voiced out loud with a smile. “I remember doing so while we were traveling in Desierto and it was most pleasant. And, perhaps the two of us could cook for one another?” she added hesitantly. “I have been practicing.”

Ranma blinked at that, his eyes rising in surprise. What have you been practicing to make?” Like Seilah, Erza’s cooking skills was nonexistent.

“Soup,” Erza said with a sigh. “Anything else I seemingly burn on contact.”

“That how about you let me do the cooking, and in return, you get to pick out Wendy’s present for me. She’s getting a little girlier now, and I think I need to pick out some more clothing that emphasizes that without being too adult, and that is a very tough line to walk.”

The two of them worked Later that night Ranma and Erza raced through the woods once more, their progress slowed slightly by the snow, but not overmuch. Ranma had taken to the trees, and Erza had Requipped a pair of cross-country skis complete with poles. The poles, Ranma noted, could double as javelins very easily, and her skis looked far too much like swords for it to be coincidence.

But the snow really started to fall, so much so that Ranma started to have trouble seeing by the limited sunlight still available. The two of them continued until the sun was fully down though, whereupon Ranma set up the tent in the lee of a snowdrift between it and a pine tree.

Inside the tent they worked together on dinner instead, with Ranma doing the actual cooking, and Erza doing the knife work. She was even better at that than Ranma was, and quickly the meal was done. The two of them sat in the tent with the flap open, watching the snow fall for a time, with the heater of the tent going full force behind them, with Erza wrapped up in a blanket and Ranma wearing his song silk cloak as he had been all day.

“You know what this makes me think of?” Ranma questioned.

“Snow cones?” Erza asked, far more seriously than the words warranted.

Ranma grinned and nodded, hopping to his feet and heading into the tent. He was back a moment later with some syrup, and the two of them had some fun scooping up bits of snow and attempting to make different kind of flavors with it. Eventually though, they were just sitting watching the snow's fall, and Ranma's hand found Erza's.

Lemon Start

Erza turned to him and leaned across the intervening distance as Ranma did the same. They met halfway, and their lips pressed together into a kiss. As was normal between the two of them, that kiss soon turned passionate, almost primal and Ranma dragged un-protesting Erza into his lap, where they began to make out furiously. Each of them tried to dominate the kiss, giving and taking, never just letting the other person do what they wanted. Despite that, it was certainly a heck of a lot of fun for both of them, as Erza began to grind hips in slow, deliberate circles against Ranma's waist, her legs locking around him.

Breaking off the kiss at this unfair advantage, Ranma used his hands to still her hips, then began to pump upwards against Erza, only the multiple layers of clothing between them deadening the sensation. "Did Jenny tell you how to do that?" Ranma muttered at one point, noticing a certain tempo to the redhead's movements he had felt previously with the more-experienced blonde.

"She might've mentioned the use of hip work in marital matters yes," Erza replied mock seriously, before lunging forward kissing him hard again.

Ranma however fell backward deeper into the tent, his arms going around her while he pulled the flap closed with one foot, hearing the 'snick' as the flap locked magically together. he then lifted his core and hips up carrying Erza up into the air for a moment then he kicked off hard from the tent floor, flipping them both through the air deeper into the tent, intending for Erza to hit the plush ground first.

Feeling them flipping midair Erza growled but didn't break off the kiss. The instant her back hit the ground she instead rolled to the side hard, so that she was once more on top. As she did, she grabbed his hands from where they had been around her waist, pinning them down above Ranma's head, while kissing him even harder, so hard their teeth actually clacked together for a second before they both backed off slightly, still kissing.

Eventually Ranma broke her grip with some difficulty. Erza was easily the most physically powerful woman Ranma had ever met. One arm then went around Erza's waist at that point, and the other hand began to move into her hair, tugging at it in short, sharp jolts, causing her to bite back a low moan even as it pulled her away from Ranma's lips.

"You know what I think?" Ranma asked for the second time that night.

“That you really like running your fingers through my hair?” she asked her voice far too much like a whimper for her liking.

“That, and I think we’re both wearing too much clothing,” Ranma replied, his voice a nearly draconic growl against her throat, as he nipped at it. He then pulling at the neckline of the sweater she was wearing and the undershirt to get at her collarbone.

Erza pushed him away before rolling off him. Standing up abruptly, she began un-equipping from her armor, before she started to pull off her warmer underclothing. Ranma just as quickly divested himself of his shirt and pants, and the two of them stood for a moment apart from one another clad in nothing but their underwear. Both of them realized suddenly where this was going, and paused, waiting for one or the other to say that this was a bad idea, to back away.

However, neither of them was willing to do so for a variety of reasons. The most ignoble of which was that this was a challenge, in a way and neither of them was willing to back away from a challenge. Another reason was far more understandable: they were freaking horny twenty-somethings. Even though Jenny had helped Ranma work out his urges twice when they were traveling, that seemed a lifetime ago now. And Erza had not had any such release since they had been traveling through Joya.

Despite that as the man, Ranma felt it incumbent on him to ask, ‘Are you, that is, do you want this to go all the way?’ he asked, not so much hesitant as questioning. Ranma wanted to, he knew. *Oh gods do I want this. But I’m not going to wreck what we have by going too fast if Erza’s not ready.*

Erza paused for a moment then very deliberately reached behind her, and un-clasped her bra. She tossed it to one side and stood there letting Ranma taking the view. Ranma had of course seen her like this before in Joya, but they had never actually had any light to see by when they were making out in his sleeping bag on the hills. And there was always someone else around anyway, which really cut down on what they were willing to do.

That was not the case here.

In Ranma’s opinion, looking at the redhead’s body was a natural wonder akin to anything he had ever seen in other girls, including himself. She had a naturally large bust, one capped by dark pink nipples, as Ranma had known, larger by a few sizes than Ranma or Jenny or even Juvia’s. But there was little bounce or sway to them despite their size, and the rest of her body looked as if it was carved from marble. Her stomach was taut, the hints of a six-pack visible as she moved, her arms had a deceptive amount of muscles on them, and her hips, though womanly, were amazingly firm. There were several scars scattered over her body, but instead of detracting from her beauty, they added to it.

Watching Ranma looking at her, Erza felt his desire almost like a physical force, saw his eyes burning like blue embers with it, with love and a softer, more artistic appreciation of her body. There was no sense of possessiveness in that look, no desire to own her or anything of that nature that she had read so often in her bodice rippers, a description she had always felt was far too possessive for her tastes. No one owned her, regardless of a few fantasies she had that involved chains and tight leather outfits. No, Erza saw Ranma didn't want to own or control her, he simply desired her, loved her, and that was enough.

With Ranma still watching her avidly, Erza crooked a finger a finger. "Come and get it."

Ranma grabbed her into a hug faster than she could back away, not that she was going to. Instead she met him, kissing him just as hard as he was kissing her. A foot slid behind him in an attempt to trip him up. But Ranma deftly stepped over it, still kissing her, his hands roaming up and down her bare back and sides until one finger caught at her panties. He then tore them away, tossing them to one side.

"You're going to pay for that," Erza growled, pulling away from the kiss a bare inch to get the words out before leaning back in. Even as she said that though she was tearing his boxers off in turn, literally tearing them in half to flutter down to his feet. Then they were kissing again and Erza pushed Ranma onto his back. Ranma pulled Erza with them, the redhead writhing against him, her wet core slowly but surely finding his shaft, moving up and down along its length.

Ranma hissed at the sensation, but this wasn't so different from the grinding he'd done with Erza or Jenny before, so he was able to control himself. That gave him the upper hand over Erza, just a bit, and he quickly flipped the two of them over, pinning Erza beneath him as he went down her body, beginning to play with her breasts and nipples with his hands and mouth. The dark cheery color of those nipples captivated him, and he played with them with his tongue, loving every bit of it, the smell, the touch of her flesh on his tongue, the way she heaved under his touch.

Her legs latched around Ranma once more and Erza moaned, slowly losing her competitive edge into a softer, mushy state of mind. Her hands began to work on his back and in his hair, kneading, pressing, moving his head to first one nipple then the other.

But when Ranma started to move down her body, she halted him, her grip on his hair causing him to look up at her. Erza shook her head and reached down, putting her hand on his shaft. It was hard, like silk covered steel to her mind, and for a moment, Erza worked her hand up and down a few times, while a part of her mind was wondering how this thing was supposed to fit inside her. Regardless, she said, "I don't want any foreplay right now, Ranma. Just... I need you inside me now, please."

With one hand still on his shaft and the other in his hair, Erza pulled Ranma up until he was laying fully on top of her. Then, with the hand still on his cock, she helped guide Ranma's shaft into her waiting, dripping, hole.

At first, it wouldn't go in, but Erza had played with herself well enough to know that she could take it, and she eventually guided his shaft inside, her hand moving around Ranma to his rear. There Ranma paused. Erza moaned and bucked under him, but Ranma kept his distance, letting her get used to his size, the fact that he was actually inside her and the feelings that evoked. But Erza was having none of his slow approach and she pulled him down into a kiss, rolling them until she was on top once more, yet still connected. Then she lifted herself up, and thrust downwards letting loose a scream and not one of pain. "AHHH!!!!

"FU, Ungg, oh, gods, Ranma!" Erza moaned as she began to ride him, moaning and throwing her hands up into her hair, at the feelings this was giving her.

Ranma was a little bit bigger than most of her toys, and she had, technically, been a virgin before this. Thank goodness my hymen's been gone for years she thought to herself dazedly. It had broken barely a few months after she started training with Laxus. The feeling of Ranma's shaft within her though, was practically indescribable. It was stretching her just slightly painfully, yet there was a tingling to it, a heat, that was just filling her from top to bottom.

After a few seconds Ranma sat up, leaning up to kiss her, which she returned, as Ranma started to lift his hips up into hers, and then, as she was about to come down on the down stroke he twisted them so she was resting on her side, her breasts pillowing together very slightly. Then as Erza was still recovering he put her top leg behind one of his shoulders, and the other was out splayed, underneath him, as he began to jackhammer into her.

She growled at the sudden shift then as Ranma began to move, moaned aloud, nearly shouting in pleasure, "Oh my God, oh fuck, right there Ranma! There!" This position allowed Ranma to hit different areas inside of her, and it wasn't long before she came, hurling her head back and shouting to the ceiling.

Ranma however couldn't handle her clamping down on him a second later, but he was still conscious enough to pull out, spraying his seed onto her chest and stomach. Then he collapsed next to her, muttering, "Damn, that was intense. Why, why did we take so long to get to this point?"

"HMmm, most definitely, and I think if we had known how good it would be, we would not have waited. I know I wouldn't have," Erza muttered, then looked down as she felt Ranma harden against her hip. For a moment she felt, not daunted, Erza would never admit to that, but perhaps wary was a proper term. However, her pride rose up in direct opposition to that feeling. "I believe the man is supposed to wear out first," she mused.

“Huh? Does that mean you’re tired Erza?” Ranma teased, leaning in to kiss her shoulder.

“Never!” she growled, gleefully pushing Ranma back down, grabbing one of his legs this time in order to control the tempo, position herself over his still hard cock at the same moment. “You will surrender to me this time!” *I probably won’t win this, but it will by god try!*

“Not freaking likely!” Ranma growled, rising to kiss her on the lips, holding her still as their lovemaking/wrestling match recommenced.

End Lemon

OOOOOO

The same night that Ranma and Erza were taking their relationship to the next level, the Wizard Saints were at last arriving at the warfront. The Christina had carried the four Wizard Saints over the Straits of Bosco and then on into Minstrel and toward its southern borders in a little more than a week, an incredibly fast time even for a flying ship.

But for the last day of their journey none of the four Wizard Saints had any care to spare for the speed of their flight or even, in Serena’s case, the hostesses who themselves were subdued. This was caused by the view below as the Christina started to fly nape of the earth which was just above tree level. As they looked down the signs of the war were already everywhere. Refugee groups heading north, army reinforcements heading south, rows of covered wagons going either direction. Here and there were guns being dragged south, but they were few and far between.

“It’s said that Minstrel is second only to Pergrande in the number of people within its borders, despite it not having nearly as many mages as Fiore or Seven,” Jura said, lowering the spyglass with which he had used to “Looking at all this I believe it.”

“Hmm... you know, I still didn’t think I’d need you lot along,” Serena muttered, scowling as he canceled the Sky Dragon’s Far Sight spell he’d used. “Yet given the scale, all of you might indeed be useful as I hunt down those who are truly behind all this.”

“True,” Draculos confirmed, noting how little real heat was in the more powerful mage’s voice. Jura too made note of it and Serena’s rising anger and magical aura.

Moments later, the Christina set down well behind the frontlines. Even so, the boom of distant magical attacks, magical cannons and nonmagical cannons were heard. Beyond that, Jura detected some other noise, like a dull roar. It was with a start that he realized it was the

sound of thousands of voices raised in shouts and shrieks, the totality creating a sound not unlike that of an ocean wave crashing against rocks.

The camp the Christina found itself in was large and spread out but that was obviously temporary. There was only one building made of wood, and it was marked by the universal red T of a hospital. Nearby was a giant Tent, large as the Christina. Dozens of men and a few women were seen coming and going from it, racing off on various errands. From the top the flag of Minstrel flew, a pale pink flag denoting a key and spear crossed with a musical note in the background.

In front of it were six guards dressed in silks and robes with long silk wraps falling from their wrists. It was only a whistle from Wolfheim that told the others there was anything interesting about it, and he whispered, "They're wearing Song Silk armor, and using Song Silk weapons too. Don't underestimate them, the magic in the silk can make them extremely formidable in very unusual ways."

Serena scoffed at that and led the way directly toward the tent. "Bah, why should the star of the show care about such bit players!? Now, where is San Jiao Shin? He should be ready to greet one such as I when I deign to come and help him."

Draculos was the only one of the Ten Wizard Saints who had been sent to Minstrel before this, a show the flag mission that Wolfheim had disdained. He had met San Jiao Shin at that time, and now frowned heavily as he looked at the man. It was quite obvious that the crisis had aged him. There were crow's feet under his eyes now, his hair was solid silver now, and his beard was not nearly as well-trimmed and cared for. He seemed to move gingerly, and one arm was in a sling from a wound he had taken.

And yet, he still carried himself with a hard-won gravitas that spoke eloquently of the fact that he had not been granted his title via heredity. Rather he had seized it and had since made the monarchy of Minstrel into something worthy of the name. As he spoke, his voice was crisp and commanding and more than one messenger raced out of the tent at his orders

"Mages, greetings. Come here," San Jiao ordered, gesturing them to follow him from where he had just given out a few more orders to another corner of the tent. There a massive diorama had been laid out, and San Jiao slid down onto a pillow on the ground as he gestured at it. "This is a lifelike model of the front. It is updated periodically via several earth mages I've assigned to a few of my main combat formations and can tell you much of what is going on. I have kept your arrival a secret from my own people so as to keep it a secret from the enemy. I've hinted that help will be coming, enough to keep our morale up but that is all. That means that your arrival will, I hope, take our enemies by complete surprise. With that, and with your own powers, we can perhaps turn the tide."

"Of course we will," God Serena scoffed. "I am here after all. No battle is too big for the one who should always be in the limelight!"

“Yes,” the king said distantly. “Of course. Though I didn’t know you would be arriving hence my concerns, God Serena.”

“Acknowledged,” the other man affirmed with a laugh. “Now, let us study this map,” he said, his voice suddenly dropping into a serious register. “I believe it is past time for the circle to be smashed, and for the people behind it to be forced out into the open at last.”

The king chuckled grimly. “Indeed. I have a few plans of my own, but if you have an idea?” The four mages told them what they planned and he nodded. “Excellent, vague enough that it can be modified. God Serena, I have no doubt you will be able to find Tartarus if it is up there, and have no problem with giving you my blessing for your part of the plan.”

“Of course I am going to find them there,” God Serena said with a laugh. “But demons, they are no match for God.”

Wolfheim and Draculos’ eyes both twitched, but before either could say anything, the other man had turned and exited the tent, having spotted something of interest: an area of the map where the battlefield abutted a large mountain, a spit off of the range of the massive rock formations which made up the Fangs portion of the Siren’s Fangs Bogs. If Serena had been the one watching the current battle, that was where he would set himself up. A second later, there was a loud boom, as he zoomed up through the air, faster than any bullet.

San Jiao waited for a second, then turned making eye contact with each of the three other Wizard Saints. “Other than that though, I do have some suggestions if you want to hear them? I know something of your magics gentlemen,” he said.

They all nodded, and he smiled grimly, gesturing down at the map as he described the order of battle. Most of Minstrel’s army was still mobilizing, but San Jiao had pushed south with the garrison of Silken Dream, picking up other garrisons as he went. Indeed, he had been well on his way to the front when he called for a king’s conclave. When he arrived the Minstrel forces stopped the Circle’s forward momentum with a series of sharp, nasty night raids and cavalry skirmishes. But the Circle’s magics and weapons had forced him backwards and the need to shield the refugees had cost him his mobility.

Opposing them however was the Circle’s army: a hundred and fifty thousand troops by some estimates, and an unknown number of mages who could share their magics with others around them for short amounts of time. They were organized, some of them were well trained, while others were the equivalent of peasant levees. They had far more in the way of rifles than his own troops, but their armor wasn’t as good. They had more powerful cannons, but his own were, when he could bring them into a fight, more numerous.

On top of that there were indeed scattered brigades of undead. Creatures pulled from the living regardless of missing limbs or similar, who attacked the living. Once his troops had been pinned down, they had overwhelmed his camps slowly but surely. San Jiao Shi had lost

more than half his command in two days of fighting. But due to his own stern grip of command he still retained the rest, five thousand trained, disciplined soldiers and a mage corps of four hundred and fifty.

As shown on the map the front was almost to a point where it narrowed again the main road passing between two hills of decent size. A river wound around and through the area, creating a kind of bulge at that point before the river moved back north both upriver and down. The river was at least several kilometers south east from the hills, and there was a marker already on the river indicating that was where the front line was right now.

That river, those hills, and the mountain Serena had noticed were the last significant geographic features for as far north and west as the map showed. If the enemy's army broke out from this point, any attempt to bottle them up would be extremely difficult before the rest of Minstrel's army could arrive at the front. If the enemy army spread out, broke into smaller forces, the Wizard Saint's ability to stop it from doing a lot of damage would have passed. Even now the enemy's army was well spread out, so that the Wizard Saints wouldn't be able to do much damage before their presences was known and somehow countered or just avoided.

"What I propose is to take a page from the enemy of an ancient ancestor. 'If you wish to disturb your enemy's plans, make a castle on the front line...'"

End Chapter

Yes, it's a sort of cliffhanger. I had written about four thousand words for their fighting, and I realized that I was really selling all four of them, even Jura, short. I also wasn't really showing the war as much as I wanted to, the weapons, gear etc. So I decided to cut the chapter off here and redo the combat portions. It's a pity, but there you are guys. Despite that, I hope you all enjoyed this Ranma-centric chapter and remember that the patron only story poll is up, so go and vote!